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EDITED BY
KENYON NICHOLSON

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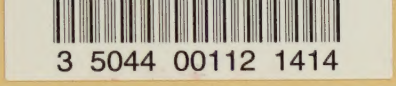
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THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

(SECOND SERIES)

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

(Second Series)

ACTABLE SHORT PLAYS FOR AMATEURS

EDITED BY

KENYON NICHOLSON

EDITOR OF "THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS," "REVUES,"
AUTHOR OF "THE BARKER," "GARDEN VARIETIES," ETC.

INTRODUCTION BY

BARRETT H. CLARK

AUTHOR OF "A STUDY OF THE MODERN DRAMA," ETC.

MCMXXVII

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

NEW YORK ✦ ✦ LONDON

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INTRODUCTION

These lines are written neither to commend the plays in this book nor to explain them. No word of mine could add much weight to the authority of the editor's choice, for Mr. Nicholson is a dramatist who not only knows his own job, but can tell others how to do theirs. The author of *The Barker,* in other words, has served a long apprenticeship in the antechamber of the Little Theater, the amateur green-room, and the colleges. In selecting a dozen one-act plays for the use of amateurs, he knew what he was about, and in this case he is offering a number of effective little shows intended for production on stages for the amusement of audiences gathered together with the intention of being amused.

So much ought to be clear to every one, yet the handsome and readable appearance of this book is, I am sure, going to cause some one to imagine (if the word isn't too strong) that the plays are intended to be some sort of literary exhibit. In the old days, not so long ago, we used to bind our plays with cheap paper covers, print them in type so small that no one could read them easily, and in every other way discourage all but actors and directors from the attempt to read them through. There seemed to be a conspiracy to keep the public from perceiving how thin most plays were, without the trappings of scenery and the words and gestures of the players. These plays belonged to the theater alone: it looked as though what was not worth reading in the dramatic line was produced.

Within the past twenty years or so things have been changed. To-day we make our printed plays just as attractive in book form as we possibly can: we have a large play-reading public, first because the theater has given us better plays (at least in this country) than it did in the days of

our fathers, and also because we recognize the necessity for serving up our printed plays in attractive fashion.

Now it is quite true that the great dramatic masterpieces can produce their effect upon us just as swiftly and inevitably in book form as when they are produced on a stage in a theater, and I am still waiting to have it proved that the greatest plays can move me when presented by actors as deeply as when they are presented by myself to myself as a silent reader. On the other hand, the plays most of us are able to act in and witness, can hardly be characterized as "great masterpieces." The average play depends to a great extent on production: players and directors can and must add their art and skill to the words and business in the author's MS., and when this collaboration is successful we have what is known as "good theater."

The plays in this book are potentially good theater. They are intended chiefly to be used by amateur actors. Some of them, like *Delilah,* require skilled acting and direction of a very high order; others, like *A Cup of Tea,* are nearly actor-proof. But they are all actable, and they take on all the vitality or truth their authors have been able to put into them only when seen on the stage.

I do not mean that the performance of these or any other plays of their kind, must be perfect, or even exceptionally good. As a matter of fact, the very shortcomings or imperfections of an amateur production serve to heighten the effect of the play. Notice, I do not say the greater the shortcomings the better the effect: what I am trying to convey is that because expert acting is neither demanded nor expected in amateur performances, the attention of the audience is focussed upon what matters most, the play itself.

So, if I may add my word of advice to you who are going to act these plays, let me urge you to choose a play that you like and understand, put it on as well as you can, and rest content if you feel you have done your best to interpret the characters and reproduce the atmosphere according to the dramatist's intention. Unless you falsify through ignorance

or egotism what has been honestly set down by the author, you will have done your part.

And what is that? What is the business of amateur players? There are many people who will tell you they have no business touching the sacred institution of the theater, that they are ruining the profession, and other things equally untrue. I can only say that the amateur was first in the field, and that so long as he understands that his field is never that of the professional, he is master there. The amateur has made his place in the theater because he loves what he is doing, and provided he labors in it for no ulterior motive, his reward will be sufficient.

An apology for amateur theatricals would be about as reasonable as an apology for green fields or red sunsets.

Barrett H. Clark

THE ELDEST

A Drama of Middle Class Life

by Edna Ferber

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EDNA FERBER

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THE ELDEST

This touching drama of American life is based upon a short story of Miss Ferber's by the same title. It would prove instructive if the student of the one-act play form were to read the original to see how deftly the author has manipulated the difficult time element in her dramatization. The effectiveness of presenting this drab slice of life depends upon the ability of the director and cast to carry out the details of the script with Belasco-like fidelity.

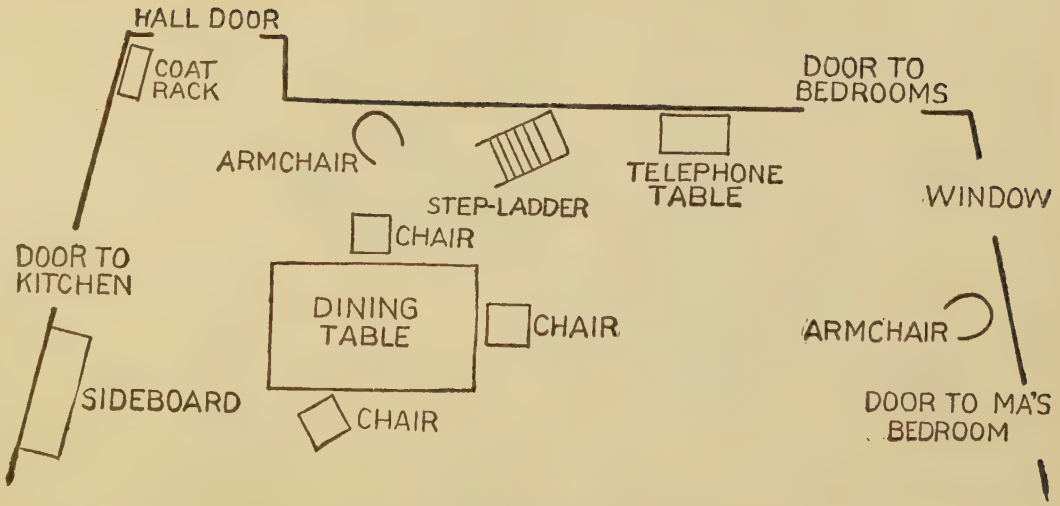
PROPERTY LIST

For Rose
- Tablecloth
- Plates
- Knives
- Forks
- Letters
- Ribbon
- Water bag
- Butter dish
- Milk pitcher
- Pink georgette dress
- Supper tray

For the Neighbor
- Cup of milk

For Pa
- Newspaper
- Spectacles

For Floss
- Paper hat bag
- Buffer



STAGE PLAN FOR "THE ELDEST"

THE ELDEST

CHARACTERS

Rose	Pa, *her father*
Floss, *her younger sister*	Ma, *a voice off stage*
Al, *her brother*	Henry Selz
	A Neighbor

Scene of the Play: *The dining room of a flat in a cheap neighborhood. It is evidently used as the common room. There are, besides the necessary dining room furniture, one or two shabby armchairs and a small table. The room is in disorder. A small rug is rolled in one corner. The room, just cleaned, has not quite been set to rights. At the back, left, a door leading into outer hall. Another right, back, into bedrooms. At left a door into kitchen. At right, well down, door to* Ma's *bedroom. This door stands open. The dining table is left center. On its bare top are two dining room chairs back to back, as though they had been put out of the way during the scrubbing of the floor. A small stepladder against the wall. At the foot of the ladder a scrubbing pail, with a brush beside it and a moist gray rag hanging over the top. A telephone on a small table, back. An old-fashioned sideboard, left, near dining table.*

As the curtain rises Rose *enters from kitchen wiping her flushed face with a corner of her damp apron. She is a woman of about forty, grown heavy about the hips and arms as houseworking women do. On her face is the vague, mute look of one whose days are spent indoors at*

sordid tasks. Her features are good. She must have been pretty in her youth. She wears a calico work dress and apron. Her sleeves are rolled up, her hair wispy, but she does not look like a sloven. She is flushed and hurried.

ROSE *comes quickly down to bare table, picks up the chairs that are on top of it and puts them in their places; unrolls the rug that lies in a corner and spreads it on the floor; goes to pail, stoops, wrings out the wet rag, meanwhile glancing anxiously about. All this is done hastily as one would hurry who is late with her work.*

A doorbell rings. ROSE *gives an annoyed exclamation. Drops her rag.*

ROSE
Who's there?

NEIGHBOR
It's only me.

ROSE
Oh, come right in.
(NEIGHBOR *enters from kitchen. She is a stout, florid woman in a flowered kimono.*)

NEIGHBOR
What smells so good?

ROSE (*wiping her hands on apron*)
I guess it must be my rhubarb pie. I just took it out of the oven.

NEIGHBOR
My folks don't care for rhubarb in any form.

ROSE
It does make the worst pie in the world.

NEIGHBOR
Well, then, why in the world . . . !

ROSE (*almost sheepishly*)
Oh, I don't know. I heard the vegetable man calling it down the street. And rhubarb, and spring, and housecleaning all seem to go together, somehow.

NEIGHBOR (*glancing swiftly around*)
My land! You started housecleaning already!

ROSE (*triumphantly*)
This morning.

NEIGHBOR
Awful early, ain't it?

ROSE
When I woke up there was a fly buzzing around the room. And I noticed the Burkes across the court had taken down their lace curtains. That started me.

NEIGHBOR
It's catching. I guess I'll start in to-morrow. It's certainly hot enough, for April. (*Turns to go.*) For goodness' sake, I'm forgetting what I came for! Can you let me have a cup of milk? Mine turned sour on me.

ROSE
Just help yourself out of the bottle in the ice box. All I need's enough for their tea and ma's glassful.
(NEIGHBOR *exits.* ROSE *goes to sideboard, gets out tablecloth, begins to lay table for supper, with plates, knives, forks, etc. A sound, off, from kitchen, as though* NEIGHBOR *has slammed the ice box door.* NEIGHBOR *appears again at door, cup carefully held in hand.*)

NEIGHBOR
How's your ma to-day?

ROSE
Just the same.

NEIGHBOR
It's certainly awful. Keeps you tied right down, don't it?

ROSE
Yes.

NEIGHBOR
Well, I always say a person like that's better off out of their misery, really. It's been years, ain't it? How long?

ROSE
Fifteen years this month.

NEIGHBOR
You must have been just a young girl.

ROSE
Floss and Al were hardly more than babies. We didn't think, at first, it would go on the way it has. The doctors said a few months—then a year—then five years. . . .

NEIGHBOR
And everything on your shoulders. I s'pose you might of had a husband and a home of your own. I bet you wasn't bad looking.

ROSE
I looked a lot like Floss looks now, they say.

NEIGHBOR
No! (*Shakes her head commiseratingly.*) Well, I got to run along. (*From kitchen, as she goes.*) I'll return your milk to-morrow.

ROSE
That's all right.
(ROSE *listens to make sure that she has gone. Takes from the capacious pocket of her apron a little sheaf of time-*

yellowed letters, worn with handling, and a faded bit of blue ribbon. She comes over to sideboard and stacks the letters neatly, fingering them one by one. On her lips is a wistful, reminiscent half smile.)

MA (*from bedroom, in a high, thin voice*)
Rose!

ROSE (*startled, spills letters on floor*)
Yes, ma!
(*Stoops, gathers letters in scrambling haste.*)

MA
It's cold in here.

ROSE
I'll get you a hot bag in a minute. (*Hurriedly ties letters together with the bit of ribbon, unlocks the top cabinet of the old-fashioned sideboard, thrusts the letters into it, locks the little door again, pockets the key. Exits to kitchen, enters again almost immediately with rubber water bag. As she crosses to bedroom she is screwing the top on the bag and wiping its wet sides with her apron. Exits bedroom, off.*)
Where'd you want it this time, ma? Your head or your feet?

MA
Here. . . . Ain't the folks home yet?

ROSE
They'll be here any minute now. I guess you've been dozing off a little.

MA (*whining*)
I haven't closed my eyes.
(*The telephone rings.* ROSE *enters dining room, goes to telephone.*)

ROSE (*at telephone*)

Hello! . . . Al isn't home yet. . . . Well, I'll tell him as soon as he comes in. . . . I told you that before. . . . Yes, Hill 2163.

(*Hangs up receiver. Picks up pail and brush, carries them to kitchen. Reënters with dish of butter and milk pitcher. Busies herself at table. An outer door slams.* PA *enters. He is a fussy, gray-haired, sprightly old man of the hack bookkeeper type. He looks warm and irritable.*)

PA

Whew! My God, but it was hot downtown! (*Throws hat and coat on nearby chair.*) What's all this muss?

ROSE

Housecleaning.

(*Back and forth between sideboard, table, kitchen, with plates, bread, etc.*)

PA (*to* MA'S *bedroom door; peers in. With a false cheeriness*)

Well, well! And how's the old girl to-night, h'm? Feel like you could punish a little supper?

MA

I couldn't eat a thing. My head's killing me again. My head. . . .

(*Her complaining voice goes on as* PA *stands a moment longer in the doorway The outer door slams.* AL *enters. He is of the slim, furtive, weasel type. He walks lightly on the balls of his feet, like an Indian, but without the Indian's dignity. In figure a born fox-trotter. His coat is over his arm. He is wearing a flashy striped shirt.*)

AL

Can you beat this for April! My shirt's stuck to my back.

ROSE
Al, put that stepladder away for me, will you?

AL (*to bedroom, back*)
I will not. What d'you think I am! The janitor!
(*Exits bedroom.* PA *to armchair, newspaper in hand. Reads.* ROSE *folds ladder, places it against wall.* AL *enters from bedroom.*)

ROSE
Oh, some girl's been calling you up. She said . . .

AL
Well, why didn't you tell me!
(*Goes to phone.*)

ROSE
I'm telling you now. Hill 2163. Pestering me all the time. I should think girls could wait till fellows call them. . . .
(ROSE *to kitchen; picks up pail.*)

AL (*to operator*)
Hill 2163. . . . No! Six three. . . . Yeh. (*To* ROSE.) Say, if they were all disappointed old maids like you, I guess they'd have to wait till . . . Hello! (*A complete change of tone.*) That you, Kid? Say, listen. How about to-night, now?
(*Drops his voice very low during remainder of conversation.* ROSE *exits, kitchen. Outer door slams.* FLOSS *enters. She is about twenty, very slim, very pretty, rather cheap, in flimsy dress, cut too low, light-colored shoes, short skirt. As she enters she is breathless and excited. She carries a paper hatbag in her hand.*)

FLOSS
Rose! Where's Rose?
(ROSE *enters from kitchen, carrying a dish.*)

ROSE
What's the matter?

FLOSS
Did you press my pink georgette, like I asked you to?

ROSE
I didn't get time. I've been cleaning all day long.

FLOSS
But I've got to have it. I got to wear it to-night. Guess who was in the store to-day!

ROSE
Who? What's that? A hat?

FLOSS
Yes. But listen . . .

ROSE
Let's see it.

FLOSS (*whips it out of bag*)
There! But let me tell you . . .

ROSE
How much?

FLOSS (*defiantly*)
Nine-fifty—trimmed.

AL (*who, having finished telephoning, has been regarding his sisters, leaning idly against the wall, cigarette in mouth*)
Trimmed is right!

FLOSS
Shut up, Al! Well, but I had to have it, Rose. I'm going to the theater to-night. And guess who with!

ROSE
Who?

FLOSS
Henry Selz!
(ROSE *stares, then smiles uncertainly, puts her dish on the table with a hand that trembles a little.*)

ROSE
What's the joke?

FLOSS
Joke, nothing! Honest to God! I was standing back of the counter at about ten. The rush hadn't really begun. Glove trade always starts late. I was standing there, kidding Herb, the stock boy, when down the aisle comes a man in a big hat, like you see in the western pictures, hair a little gray at the temples and everything, just like a movie actor. I said to Herb, "Is it real?" I hadn't got the words out of my mouth when the fellow sees me, stands stock-still in the middle of the aisle with his mouth open and his eyes sticking out. "Register surprise," I said to Herb, and looked around for the camera. At that minute he takes two jumps over to where I'm standing, grabs my hands and says, "Rose! Rose!" kind of choky. "Not by about twenty years," I says. "I'm Floss, Rose's sister. Let go my hands!"

ROSE (*vibrantly*)
You said, "I'm Floss, Rose's sister, let go my hands." And then—?

FLOSS
He looked kind of stunned, just for a minute. His face was a scream, honestly. Then he said, "But of course. Fifteen years. But I had always thought of her as just the same." And he kind of laughed, ashamed, like a kid. And the whitest teeth!

ROSE
Yes, they were—white. Well?

FLOSS
Well, I said, "Won't I do instead?" Like that. "You bet you'll do!" he said. And then he told me his name, and how he's living out in Spokane and his wife was dead, and he had made a lot of money—fruit, or real estate or something. He talked a lot about it at lunch, but I didn't pay any attention. As long as he's really got it, a lot I care how . . .

ROSE
At lunch?

FLOSS
Everything from crab meat to coffee. I didn't believe it could be done in one hour. Believe me, he had those waiters jumping. It takes money. He asked all about you, and ma, and everything. And he kept looking at me and saying, "It's wonderful!" I said, "Isn't it!" but I meant the lunch. He wanted me to go driving this afternoon. Auto and everything. Kept calling me Rose and Rosebud. It made me kind of mad, and I told him how you look. He said, "I suppose so," and asked me to go to a show to-night. Listen, will you press my georgette? I got to have it.

ROSE
I'll iron it while you're eating. I'm not hungry. (*Turns. Goes to kitchen door.*) Did you say he was gray?

FLOSS (*on her way to bedroom, beginning to unbutton her blouse*)
Gray? Oh, you mean . . . why, just here and here. Interesting, but not a bit old. And he's got that money look that makes waiters and doormen jump. (*At door.*) I don't want any supper. Just a cup of tea. Haven't got time to dress decently, as it is.

AL (*leaves wall and phone table, against which he has been lounging. Comes down*)
Your story interests me strangely, little gell. But there's a couple other people would like to eat, even *if you wouldn't.* (FLOSS *exits with a withering glance at* AL.) Come on with that supper, Ro! Nobody staked me to a lunch to-day.
(AL *and* PA *to table, seat themselves.* ROSE *dishes out the supper to them, though she eats nothing herself.*)

ROSE
I'll dish up for you, and then I'll get ma's tray, and press out that dress. I'm late with everything to-night, seems.

AL (*eating*)
Some doings ourself to-day, down at the store, believe me! The Old Man's son started in to learn the retail end of the business. Back of the cigar case with the rest of us, waiting on trade and looking like a Yale yell.

PA (*looking over the top of his specs which he has put on while reading the paper*)
Mannheim's son, you mean! The president of the company's son!

AL
Yep. And I guess he loves it, huh! The Old Man wants him to learn the cigar business from the ground up. I'll bet he never gets higher than the basement, that guy. Went out to lunch at one and never showed up till four. Wears English clothes and smokes a brand of cigarettes we don't even carry.
(ROSE *has finished waiting on the men for the time. Goes to* FLOSS'S *room. Out again at once with a pink georgette dress in her hand.*)

PA (*rises, picks up newspaper, which he scans while eating*)
I see the Fair's got a spring housecleaning sale. Advertise

a new kind of extension curtain rod. And, Rose, Scouro, three cakes for a quarter.

ROSE (*off*)
I'm not wasting money on truck like that when half the time I can't make the housekeeping money last through the week, as it is.

PA
Your ma did it.

ROSE
Fifteen years ago liver wasn't fifty cents a pound. (*Exits kitchen.*)

FLOSS (*calling from bedroom*)
Rose, pour me out a cup of tea, will you?
(ROSE, *in kitchen, does not hear.*)

AL (*raises his voice*)
Oh, Rose! Come on in here and pour out a cup of tea for the little lady.

ROSE (*from kitchen*)
Well, then, carry in ma's tray for me.

FLOSS (*enters from bedroom. She is in petticoat and flimsy kimono, evidently having stopped halfway in her toilette's progress. Her cheeks are very pink. Her hair is shiningly coiffed about her ears*)
Tray! Well, I should say not. I haven't got time to eat. (*Sits at table. Pours herself a cup of tea, which she gulps hurriedly.*)

AL (*sneering*)
Every move a Pickford! And so girlish withal.

FLOSS
Shut up, Al. (ROSE *enters from kitchen with tray.*

Crosses to MA'S *room.*) Guess who I waited on to-day, Rose!

ROSE (*without interest. Into bedroom*)
Who?

FLOSS
Gladys Moraine! I knew her the minute I saw her. She's prettier off than on, I think. She's playing here in "Our Wives." I waited on her, and the other girls in the department were wild. Bought a dozen pair of white kids and made me give 'em to her huge so she could shove her hand right into 'em, like a man does. Two sizes too big. All the swells wear 'em that way. And only one ring—an emerald the size of a dime.

PA
What kind of clothes'd she wear?

AL (*in a dreamy falsetto*)
Ah, yes! What *did* she wear?

FLOSS (*animatedly*)
Just a suit, kind of plain, and yet you'd notice it. And sables! And a Gladys Moraine hat. Everything quiet and plain and dark; and yet she looked like a million dollars. (*Sighs.*) I felt like a roach while I was waiting on her, though she was awful sweet to me. . . . Hurry up with that dress, Rose.

ROSE
In a minute. I've just got the collar to do.

FLOSS (*rises*)
He'll be here any minute now. And this place looks like the devil.

ROSE (*stops short*)
Why—Floss! He isn't going to call for you, is he? Here?

FLOSS
Sure. With a taxi. Did you think I was going to meet him on the corner or something?
(*Goes toward bedroom.*)

ROSE
But listen! Floss!

FLOSS
Don't bother me.
(*Exits bedroom.*)

AL (*rises from table, yawning*)
Guess I'll do a little beautifying myself.
(*Rubs an investigating hand over chin.* ROSE *to kitchen, her whole figure drooping, shrunken somehow.* AL *to bedroom.* PA *throws paper down, yawns elaborately, pushes back his chair. A sound as of some one pounding on a closed door, off.*)

AL (*off*)
Hurry up and get through primping in there, will you! What d'you think this is—a Turkish bath?

FLOSS (*shrilly, off*)
Shave in your own room, can't you!
(ROSE *enters from kitchen, the freshly pressed dress in her hand. She prinks out the pleatings and ruffles as she goes toward* FLOSS'S *room.*)

PA
Well, I guess I'll just drop around to the movie.

ROSE
Don't you want to sit with ma a minute, first?

PA
When I get back. I don't want to come in in the middle of the picture. They're showing the third installment of the "Adventures of Aline."

ROSE
Ma'll be asleep by that time. You know it.

PA
I been slaving all day. I guess I got the right to a little amusement! A man works his fingers to the bone for his family and then his own daughter nags him!
(*Snatches up hat and coat from chair, stamps out.* ROSE *looks after him, her shoulders sagging, her face drawn. The outer door slams noisily. From the bedroom comes the sound of* AL'S *whistling and singing in an off-key tenor.*)

FLOSS (*enters hurriedly, making frantic passes at her finger nails with a dilapidated buffer. She is in petticoat and pink camisole.*)
Where's that dress?

ROSE
Here.
(FLOSS *clutches it impatiently. The doorbell rings, three long, loud rings.*)

FLOSS (*panic-stricken*)
It's him! (*Slips one arm into the dress.*) Rose, you'll have to go.

ROSE (*shrinking, cowering*)
I can't! I can't! (*Her eyes dart to and fro like those of a haunted thing seeking to escape. She runs to* AL'S *door.*) Al! Al, go to the door, will you?

AL (*in a smothered mumble*)
Can't. Shaving.
(*The bell sounds again, three loud, impatient rings.*)

FLOSS (*in a venomous whisper as though she could be heard downstairs*)

Rose! I can't go with my waist open! For God's sake answer the door!
(*Runs back to bedroom, fastening gown as she goes.*)

Rose (*in a kind of moan*)
I can't! I—can't!
(*And goes. As she goes she passes a futile, work-worn hand over her hair, plucks off her apron, casts it in a corner, first wiping her flushed face with it. She presses an electric button that opens lower door. Opens hall door. Stands there, waiting. A brief pause.* Henry Selz *is heard approaching with a springy step.* Henry Selz *stands in the door. He is about forty-two or three, well dressed, prosperous looking, almost youthful. He stares at* Rose *uncertainly.*)

Rose (*tremulously*)
How-do, Henry.

Henry (*the look of uncertainty changing to pitying incredulity*)
Why, how-do, Rose! I didn't know you—for a minute. Well, well! It's been a long time. Let's see. Ten—twelve—about thirteen, fourteen years, isn't it?

Rose
Fifteen. This month. Won't you come in and sit down? Floss'll be ready in a minute. (*They sit, he a little ill at ease,* Rose *nervously tucking back her wisps of hair, twisting her fingers.*) Things look a little upset around here. I've been housecleaning.

Henry
That's all right. (*Dabs at his face with handkerchief.*) Certainly is warm for this time of year. Well, and how've you been? Did little sister tell you how flabbergasted I was when I saw her this morning? Say, it was the funniest thing! I got kind of balled up for a minute and

thought it was you. I'm darned if it didn't take fifteen years off my age—just like that! She tell you?

ROSE
Yes. She told me.

HENRY
She's the image of the way you used to look.

ROSE
I've changed—quite a lot.

HENRY (*feebly*)
Oh, I don't know, Rose. You're a pretty good looking girl yet.

ROSE
You've changed, too. But it's different with a man. You're better looking now than you were fifteen years ago.

HENRY
Things have kind of come my way. I was pretty late learning about golf, and caviar and tailors. But say, it doesn't take long. . . . I hear your ma's still sick. (ROSE *nods her head.*) That certainly is tough. And you never married, h'm?

ROSE
Never married.

HENRY
I guess you never held it up against me, did you, Rose? My marrying? When your ma took sick and we had to put it off, who'd have thought you'd be stuck here all these years?

ROSE
I never held it up against you, Henry. When you stopped writing I just knew. . . .

HENRY (*glances around the room*)
You've been going on like this, taking care of the family?

ROSE
Yes.
(FLOSS *enters, a radiant, glowing, girlish vision. She is wearing the gown* ROSE *has pressed, and the pert new hat.* HENRY SELZ *rises. His eyes are fixed admiringly on* FLOSS.)

HENRY
Ah! And how's the little girl to-night!

FLOSS (*gives him her hand*)
Did I keep you waiting a terribly long time?

HENRY
No, not a bit. Rose and I were chinning over old times, weren't we, Rose? (*A kindly, clumsy thought strikes him.*) Say, look here, Rose. We're going to a show. Why don't you just run and put on your hat and come along, h'm? Come on!

ROSE
No, thanks, Henry. Not to-night. You and Floss run along.

HENRY
Well, remember me to your ma.

ROSE
I will, Henry. I'm sorry you can't see her. But she don't see anybody—poor ma.

HENRY (*shakes her hand heartily*)
Good-by, Rose. Glad I saw you.

ROSE
Good-by.

FLOSS
I hope we won't be late. (*At door.*) I hate to come in after the curtain's up, don't you? (FLOSS *and* HENRY *go,* FLOSS *still chattering.*) I went to a show one night and the woman behind us was simply furious because . . . . (ROSE *peers after her, anxiously, as a mother would. The door closes.* ROSE *stands still, her arms hanging straight at her sides, staring after the door is shut. The outer door slams as before.* ROSE *turns, mechanically, and goes into her mother's room. She comes out immediately, carrying the littered supper tray.*)

MA (*in her high-pitched, thin voice*)
Who was that?

ROSE (*over her shoulder*)
That was—Henry Selz.

MA (*wanderingly*)
Henry? Henry Selz? Henry—oh, yes. Did he go out with Floss?

ROSE
Yes.
(*Goes slowly toward kitchen with tray.*)

MA (*in a whine*)
It's cold in here.

ROSE
I'll get you a bag in a minute, ma.
(*Exits kitchen.* AL *enters from bedroom, shrugging himself into his coat. He is shaved, brushed, powdered to a marvel. Glances around, furtively, goes toward kitchen, encounters* ROSE *entering with hot water bag.*)

AL
I'll take that to ma.

(*Takes bag to* MA'S *bedroom.* ROSE *crosses to cluttered supper table, sits wearily. Pours a cup of cold tea.* AL *enters from* MA'S *bedroom, over to* ROSE, *after regarding her speculatively for a moment. Lays a hand on her shoulder.*)

AL
Ro, lend me a couple of dollars, will you?

ROSE
I should say not!

AL (*douses his cigarette in the dregs of a convenient teacup, leans over, presses his pale, powdered cheeks to* ROSE'S *sallow one. His arm is about her, his hand patting her shoulder*)
Oh, come on, kid. Don't I always pay you back? Come on. Be a sweet ol' sis. (*Kisses her.* ROSE *shrugs away impatiently.*) I wouldn't ask you, only I've got a date to go to Luna Park and I couldn't get out of it. I tried, honest.

ROSE
Don't you think I ever get sick of slaving for a thankless bunch like you! Well, I do. Sick and tired of it, that's what! Coming around asking for money as if I was a bank.

AL
Oh, come on, Ro. Just this once.

ROSE (*grudgingly, wearily*)
There's a dollar bill and some small change in the can on the second shelf in the china closet.
(AL *is off like a terrier. From the kitchen pantry comes the clink of metal against metal. He is back in a flash, snatches his hat, is out without a backward glance at* ROSE. *The outer door slams loudly.* ROSE *sits stirring her cold*

tea, slowly, as one does who will not drink it. She is gazing dully down into the cup. She turns her head and looks at the closed door of the sideboard cabinet, where the packet of letters lies. She crosses to sideboard, unlocks door, takes out letters, comes slowly back to table, stands a moment, tears letters across, crushes them in her fingers, and throws the pieces among the greasy supper dishes. Suddenly her face puckers up almost comically, like a child's. She sinks into a chair at the table, her head comes down on her outstretched arms among the supper things, so that the dishes jump and tinkle.)

MA (*off*)
What's that! Rose!

ROSE (*raises her head, stifling her sobs*)
Nothing, ma.
(*Wipes her eyes with the palm and back of her hand, sniffling. Sits staring down at the table. Her eye is caught by a headline in the evening paper that* PA *has thrown down on the table. She picks it up almost unconsciously, scans it, her face, twisted with grief, gradually losing its look of pain. As the curtain descends she rises, gathers up a handful of dishes, and drags her accustomed way to the kitchen.*)

CURTAIN

POST MORTEMS

A Comedy

by Charles Divine

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POST MORTEMS

This play opens advantageously with a scene which can be made extremely funny. Mr. and Mrs. Barker are delightfully written and can be made very natural. The first burglar must be master of the situation at all times. The second burglar has less *savoir faire* and can be played as hard as one would naturally expect a burglar to be. The card game must move swiftly and yet must be clean cut. Throughout the play there are numerous small pieces of business indicated by the author which are very valuable and must not be overlooked.

PROPERTY LIST

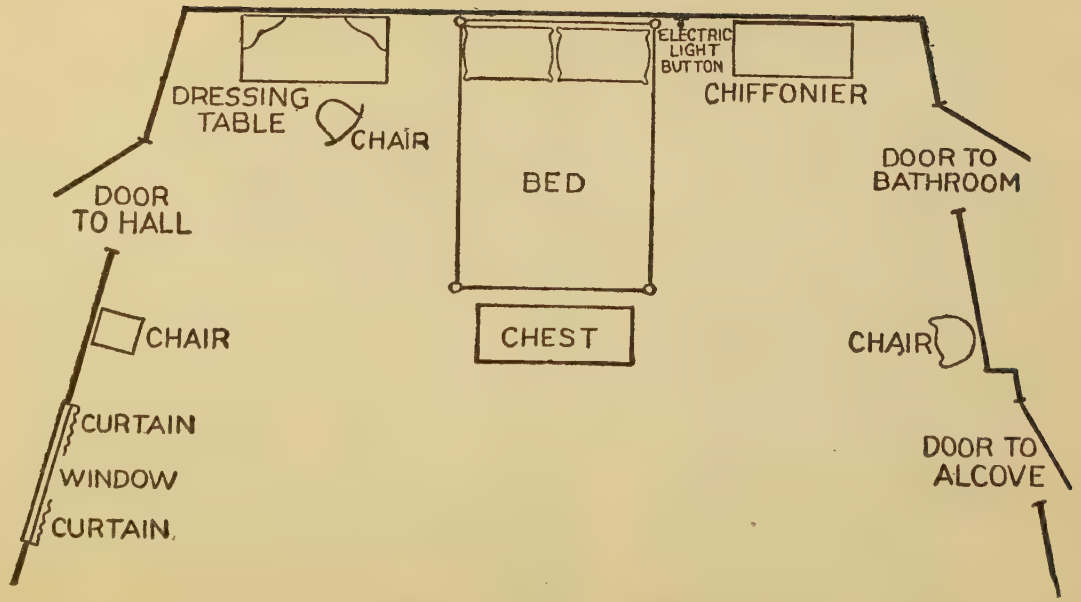
For Jimmy
- Jewel case
- Pistol
- Cards
- Pencil
- Paper
- Purse
- Money
- Jimmy

For Mr. Barker
- Bathrobe
- Pajamas
- Slippers
- Bridge table

For Mrs. Barker
- Necklace
- Rings
- Dressing robe
- Nightgown
- Slippers

For Al
- Revolver
- Wallet
- Money

Albion College Library



STAGE PLANS FOR "POST MORTEMS"

POST MORTEMS

CHARACTERS

MR. RICHARD BARKER
MRS. RICHARD BARKER
JIMMY, *a burglar*
AL, *his pal*

SCENE: *A bedroom, attractively furnished, with a door from the hall at the upper left, and on the opposite side of the room two doors, one to an alcove, lower right; the other to the bathroom, upper right. There is a bed in the back of the room, at the middle; a bureau at its right; a dressing table with a lamp lit at its left, and also at the left is a large window across the embrasure of which hang heavy curtains.*

At the rise of the curtain JIMMY, *the burglar, enters cautiously from the window, left, and examines the dimly lit room. He goes to the dressing table and discovers a jewel case there. His further examination of the room is interrupted by the sound of approaching voices. From his pocket he takes a pistol which he holds grimly in his hand as he glides behind the window curtain, where he waits.* MR. BARKER *enters angrily, followed by his wife, at the door at the left. They are in evening dress.* MRS. BARKER *switches on more light. In the center of the bedroom* MR. BARKER *wrenches off his dinner coat.*

MR. BARKER
I'm fed up with this wrangling! (*He dives into the alcove at the right and reappears with a bathrobe over his arm.*) Fed up!

MRS. BARKER
Beast!
(*She sits down at the dressing table where she removes a necklace.* THE BURGLAR, *standing behind the curtain but visible to the audience, watches her eagerly.*)

MR. BARKER
I suppose so. Where are my pajamas?

MRS. BARKER (*dropping her necklace into the jewel box*)
In the bathroom . . . (*she adds accusingly*) . . . where you left them yourself! (MR. BARKER *goes into the bathroom at the right.*) I hate you!

MR. BARKER (*calling from the bathroom, as he gets in his pajamas*)
So do I—I mean hate *you.*

MRS. BARKER (*taking rings from her fingers*)
You won't do anything that's expected of you. I'll never go through another evening like this one!

MR. BARKER (*still talking from the bathroom, offstage*)
You won't get the chance. . . . The cap is off the tube of toothpaste again—where *you* left it yourself! Oozing out all over the shelf. Ugh, what a sticky mess!

MRS. BARKER (*bitterly*)
To think that you picked out the evening when the Newcombs came to call, to make such a fool of yourself! You could have done it just as well any other evening—when the Womsers were here, or the Dibbles, or the Flumerfelts, or those men from your office you thought we ought to entertain, and who left cigar ashes in all the plates! . . . You knew the Newcombs were the most important people socially in town. And we've only been here a year!
(*She rises and goes into the alcove to undress.*)

MR. BARKER
I did what any intelligent man would do, didn't I?

(*Pause.*) You don't think *you* possess all the finesse in the world, do you? (*He pauses. Silence. No answer.*) Do you? Do you think you've got a monopoly on it, and that you can . . .

(*He enters from the bathroom, breaking off his speech as he discovers, disconcerted, that she is not there.*)

MRS. BARKER (*speaking from the alcove*)
What did you say?

MR. BARKER
I asked if you think you possess all the finesse in the world!

MRS BARKER (*from the alcove, witheringly*)
Finesse? You? With a sledge hammer! No wonder you're in the iron business.

MR. BARKER
It was a good enough business to buy you that pearl necklace you just took off.

(THE BURGLAR *gazes fascinated at the jewel box, which* MR. BARKER *approaches and glances at a moment.*)

MRS. BARKER
Mercenary! I don't know what the Newcombs will think.

MR. BARKER
I know what I think. I'm disgusted when I think of tonight—and your diamonds! (THE BURGLAR'S *interest increases.*) There you sat, with the three biggest diamonds you could hold in your hand, and four others.

(THE BURGLAR *is all agog.*)

MRS. BARKER
Yes, I had the diamonds . . . (*she reënters wearing a dressing robe over her nightgown*) . . . the ace, king, queen, ten, nine, eight, and three. But you didn't have a bid. You only had the measly little five spot.

(THE BURGLAR, *suddenly crestfallen, makes a gesture of chagrin.*)

MR. BARKER
But I had the queen of spades, three times, the ace and king of hearts, and a little one, and six clubs—ace, jack, ten . . . (*he counts them off deliberately*) . . . nine and two others.
(THE BURGLAR'S *interest renews in listening to the argument, curiously.*)

MRS. BARKER
But Mrs. Newcomb had five diamonds to the jack.

MR. BARKER
That wouldn't have made any difference if . . .

MRS. BARKER
The difference was that you played the hand like a moron! And we lost the rubber! (*She sweeps past him, goes over to the bed, gets in, pulling the covers about her, and discards her dressing robe, which she flings from her.*) You shouldn't have bid three no trump. What you need is some bridge sense!

MR. BARKER (*crawling glumly into his side of the bed and leaving a wide, angry space between him and his* WIFE)
Mr. Newcomb was out of diamonds, and he happened to hold the king of clubs and three others. What you need is some *common* sense!

MRS. BARKER
What I need is a divorce!

MR. BARKER
You'll get it . . . after this.

MRS. BARKER
Yes, and I'll marry again.

MR. BARKER
I suppose so. A fool and her alimony are soon parted.

MRS. BARKER
Put out the light! I want to sleep.
(MR. BARKER *reaches for the electric button near the bed and extinguishes the lights. He pulls the covers up to his chin and prepares to sleep. His* WIFE *seems to be asleep already, as if exhaustion had come to her tired nerves.* MR. BARKER *closes his eyes and sleeps too. After a moment* JIMMY, THE BURGLAR, *moves from behind the curtain, glides towards the dressing table, and is about to reach for the jewel case when he makes a slight noise and hears a movement in the bed. Swiftly he glides back behind the curtain again.*)

MR. BARKER (*waking, reaches for the electric-light button, pushes it, and floods the room with light again. Beside him his* WIFE *sits up in bed and blinks her eyes, yawning*)
I thought I heard somebody tramping.

MRS. BARKER (*rubbing her eyes, and only partially catching his words*) Trumping, did you say? Whether it's trumps or no trumps, you'd overbid.

MR. BARKER
Are you going to keep that up forever? I had a bid that last hand.
(*Behind the curtain* THE BURGLAR *grows impatient and restive.*)

MRS. BARKER (*now fully awake*)
But not three no trumps!

MR. BARKER
You bid three diamonds yourself, didn't you?
(*He faces her in bed, with all the anger reawakened in him.*)

MRS. BARKER
Yes, counting on your original no-trump bid for support. I had two singletons which were good for diamonds but not for no trump. There was no reëntry in my hand. (*Behind the curtain* THE BURGLAR *finds it more and more difficult to remain still. He leans forward as if about to step out and reveal himself. He clenches and unclenches one hand. The other still holds the pistol.*) If I had a raise in no trump, I would have gone on to two no trump without raising the contract to three and going to diamonds.

MR. BARKER (*growling*)
I could have made it anyway!

MRS. BARKER
No, you couldn't!

JIMMY (*unable to hold himself back any longer, steps out with the pistol in his hand*)
Look here!

MRS. BARKER (*screaming*)
Oh!

MR. BARKER
My God!
(JIMMY *moves forward with an eager stride.*)

MRS. BARKER
Don't kill us!

MR. BARKER (*holding up his hands*)
No, don't shoot. We've got our hands up. (*To his* WIFE.) Put your hands up, Mabel! Are you paralyzed?

JIMMY
Oh, don't worry! I just want to talk to you.

MRS. BARKER (*beseechingly*)
Take my rings and things—there on the dressing table—and go!

JIMMY (*shaking his head*)
No. I want to talk to your husband about that hand.

MR. BARKER (*looking at his uplifted hands above his head*)
Which hand?

JIMMY
The one you held downstairs. (*To* MR. BARKER *reassuringly.*) You could have made your bid. But it was played wrong. When the singleton queen of clubs was led from your hand, madam, and he didn't drop his ace on it (*turning from* MRS. BARKER *to* MR. BARKER *again, and gesturing at the latter with the hand holding the pistol;* MR. BARKER *winces and* MRS BARKER *catches her breath, astonished*), that's where he made his mistake. He should have overtaken it. Because by taking the trick with the queen he was forced to lead from the dummy . . . and he could only lead straight into his opponent's hand.

MR. BARKER (*eyeing* JIMMY *up and down*)
Good Lord!

JIMMY
Don't you see that by taking the trick with the queen you were forced to lead from the dummy . . . and you could only lead straight into your opponent's hand?
(*He gestures insistently, still with the hand holding the pistol.*)

MR. BARKER (*bewildered*)
Aw, aw. . . .

MRS. BARKER (*forgetting the menacing pistol in her interest in the bridge technic, leans forward and beams at* JIMMY)

That's right! (*Turns to her* HUSBAND.) *He's absolutely* correct, Richard. (*To* JIMMY.) But how do you know all about this?

JIMMY
I've seen too many games lost by the same mistake.

MRS. BARKER
You have? You play bridge?

JIMMY
I used to make my living at it . . . I and my partner.

MRS. BARKER
You made your living at it? Where?

JIMMY
On suburban trains, riding into the big cities with the bankers and brokers, and at clubs . . . before they got wise and set the police on our trail. Now bridge is ruined for me as a profession, though I still yield to no one in my acquaintance with the fine points of the game. I remember the night I won five thousand dollars from Van Rensselaer Gould. . . .

MRS. BARKER (*impressed*)
You've played with *him?*

JIMMY
Yes, indeed. But in your case to-night you were in the dummy with no hearts left and no clubs left. (*He gestures again with the gun at* MR. BARKER, *who ducks.*) Don't you see my point?

MR. BARKER (*hastily*)
Yes, yes, I see it, all too well. But—but please be careful. It might explode.

JIMMY (*remembering that he is still holding the gun*) Oh, excuse me. (*He lowers the gun.*) I got so interested talk-

ing shop that I forgot my manners. (*He puts the gun in his pocket.*) A thousand pardons. (*He turns down his coat collar and reveals a fine silk shirt and an elegantly striped necktie. He is well dressed, urbane, and polished. He continues to talk with gestures free of firearms, pausing once to glance at his hands and to rub his finger nails on his sleeve, to preserve the glow of his manicure.*) And without clubs, the best suit in your own hands, cleared. That's why you got set.

MR. BARKER
This is amazing.

MRS. BARKER (*admiringly*)
Perfectly wonderful!

JIMMY
Now if you, sir, had overtaken her queen with your ace, you would have been in your own hand. At the end you would have run four club tricks, and (*he concludes with a graceful gesture*) made four no trump!

MR. BARKER (*triumphantly*)
And rubber! (*To his* WIFE.) I told you so!

MRS. BARKER
I'd believe *him* (*nodding at* JIMMY) but not *you.* (*Contemptuously to her* HUSBAND. *She turns to* JIMMY *and continues.*) Could you show me the play?
(*She swings out of bed, wraps her dressing gown about her, and fumbles eagerly for her slippers.*)

JIMMY
Delighted! Got some cards?

MRS. BARKER
In the upper bureau drawer. Richard! (*To her* HUSBAND.) Get the table!
(*While* JIMMY *goes to the bureau for a deck of cards,* MR.

BARKER *brings a table hastily from the alcove and sets it up in the middle of the room.* MRS. BARKER *drags up chairs.*)

JIMMY (*sorting out the cards as he talks*)
You had the queen of spades, didn't you, Mister . . . Mister . . .

MR. BARKER
Barker. Yes, the queen and three others.

JIMMY
My name's James Courtney. And the ace and the king of hearts. . . .

MRS. BARKER
Here! Let me help you distribute them. (*She takes the cards from* JIMMY.) Oh, I wish we could play it out like a regular hand. But we lack a fourth, don't we?

JIMMY
No, we don't. Al is outside.

MRS. BARKER
Who?

JIMMY
My pal. I'll call him. (*He steps to the window and calls quietly into the night.*) Al! Come on in! I've got a little surprise for you.

AL (*entering and giving a start at the sight of* MR. *and* MRS. BARKER, *and quickly drawing his revolver*)
What's up? Have they got the drop on you, Jimmy?

JIMMY
No, no. These are friends. Put away your gun!

AL (*at first looking astonished and then obeying wearily*)
You're always meeting friends—and letting them inter-

fere with business. (*To* MR. *and* MR. BARKER.) No offense, folks, but you don't know Jimmy the way I do.

JIMMY (*introducing him*)
This is Al, Mrs. Barker. Al Wiggers. And Mr. Barker. Al Wiggers.

MRS. BARKER (*nodding*)
Charmed!

MR. BARKER
How do you do?
(*They shake hands.*)

AL (*looking at the card table and then shaking his head admiringly*)
Jimmy can smell a bridge game a mile off!
(*He begins to wander curiously about the room.*)

JIMMY (*protesting self-consciously, though greatly pleased*)
No, no. It was quite by accident.
(*He resumes his chair at the table between* MR. *and* MRS. BARKER.)

MRS. BARKER
A lucky one for us. I've never met anybody who displayed a surer grasp of the intricacies of the game.

MR. BARKER (*glancing conciliatingly at his* WIFE)
Yes, we're very fortunate, aren't we, dear?

MRS. BARKER (*rebuffing him disdainfully*)
Don't speak to me!

MR. BARKER (*turning back to* JIMMY)
I'll bet I can make my bid the way I said.

JIMMY
How much do you want to bet? Ten cents a point or twenty?

MR. BARKER
Make it twenty.

JIMMY
All right. (*He catches sight of* AL *coming away from the dressing table.*) Al! What have you got there?

AL
Nothing.

JIMMY
Don't lie to me! Come here! (AL *approaches reluctantly.*) Take that hand out of your pocket.
(*As he obeys,* JIMMY *reaches into* AL'S *pocket and takes out some jewelry.*)

MRS. BARKER
My necklace!

JIMMY
Permit me to return it. (*He hands the necklace to her apologetically.*) Al simply forgot himself. (*To* AL.) I'm surprised at you! We're among friends and bridge players. (*He motions* AL *into the chair opposite and reaches into his own pocket, turning to* MRS. BARKER.) That reminds me, Mrs. Barker, I meant to return these rings several minutes ago. (*He deposits* MRS. BARKER'S *rings in front of her.*) I picked them up before I really understood. You'll pardon me?

MRS. BARKER
Oh, thanks. . . . You *are* a gentleman.

MR. BARKER
And a scholar.

AL (*groaning*)
But a damned poor business partner!

JIMMY (*taking up his cards, as the others do theirs*) Let's

see, it's my first bid, isn't it? (MRS. BARKER *nods.*) One club.

MR. BARKER
One heart.

AL (*absent-mindedly, looking at the jewelry in front of* MRS. BARKER)
Two diamond rings!

JIMMY
Al! Be yourself!

AL (*piteously*)
I *am* myself.

JIMMY
Then be somebody else for a minute.

AL
All right. I pass the diamonds.

JIMMY
You'd better.

MRS. BARKER (*to* AL)
It was just a slip. I forgive you, Mr. Wiggers.

AL
You would if you knew all I've suffered from bridge.

MRS. BARKER
Suffered?

AL
Yes. It kept us two extra weeks in Atlanta after our term was finished.

MR. BARKER
In the penitentiary?

AL (*dismally*)
Yes. He (*indicating* JIMMY) wouldn't leave when we were free to go.

MRS. BARKER
Why not?

AL
Because our cell mates played such good hands of bridge. Jimmy wanted to keep the game going until their terms were up. They were serving life sentences for murder.

JIMMY
They *were* remarkably good players.

AL
Even now, every time we get within a day's ride of Atlanta, he wants to go back there for the week-end.

MR. BARKER (*to his* WIFE)
It's your bid, Mabel.

MRS. BARKER
Don't speak to me, I said!
(AL'S *jaw drops in astonishment. He gazes from* MRS. BARKER *to* MR. BARKER *and back.*)

MR. BARKER (*explanatorily to* AL)
Mrs. Barker is not herself to-night.

MRS. BARKER
Don't pay any attention to him, Mr. Wiggers. Where bridge is concerned, my husband is *non compos mentis.*

AL (*who doesn't understand the Latin phrase, gapes blankly for a moment, and then pretends that he understands*)
Oh, he's non compo . . . he's like that, is he? (*Nods his head.*) What does the doctor say about it?

JIMMY (*nudging him*)
Keep still!

MRS. BARKER
Two hearts.

MR. BARKER (*to* AL)
That ordinarily beat as one. But not to-night, Mr. Wiggers.

AL (*who still does not understand*)
Yes, yes. It must be very painful.

JIMMY
Two spades.

MR. BARKER
Two no trump.

MRS. BARKER
Pass.

JIMMY
Three spades.

MR. BARKER
Three no trump.

MRS. BARKER (*exasperated*)
You insist on making a fool of yourself again!

MR. BARKER
I can make the bid. Wait and see.

JIMMY
We're playing for high stakes, remember?

MR. BARKER
I know. It's your lead, Mr. Wiggers. (AL *leads, and they begin playing the hand.* MRS. BARKER, *who is dummy, looks on, enraged, at her* HUSBAND. *At the end, however, he is the winner. He is exultant.*) I made it! I made it!

MRS. BARKER
Fool's luck.

JIMMY
You beat us all right. I'll have to admit it. I never thought it would work out that way.

AL (*discouraged*)
I knew we were beat as soon as he (*nodding at* JIMMY) saw a deck of cards.
(JIMMY *begins figuring with pencil and paper.*)

MRS. BARKER
Can't we go on and play another?

JIMMY
No, I'm sorry, Mrs. Barker. But I'll have to decline. You see, Al and I have urgent reasons for wanting to catch a train before the town is astir. (*Consulting his paper.*) We owe you fourteen dollars apiece. Have you got yours, Al?

AL (*opening his wallet with a sigh and counting out the exact amount, all he has*)
Now we'll have to take a freight!

JIMMY (*emptying the contents of his own purse on the table*)
I'm eleven dollars short.

MR. BARKER
That's all right. Don't think of it.

MRS. BARKER
Of course! We'd feel like robbers . . . oh, I beg your pardon. I mean . . .

JIMMY
That's all right. I'm not sensitive. (*He takes his gun out of one pocket and a jimmy out of the other.*) My gun is not much good. I picked it up second hand for ten dollars.

And this jimmy is worth one dollar. That makes it just right.

(*He places these objects with the pile of money on the table and pushes his chair back.*)

MR. BARKER

Well, if you insist. (*Elated, he reaches over and pats his* WIFE'S *hand.*) Three no trump, and I made it, dear.

MRS. BARKER (*jerking her hand away*)

Don't touch me!

JIMMY (*studying them both a moment*)

Come, come! You shouldn't keep this up, my friends. (*He addresses them eloquently.*) It's been my experience that the worst thing about bridge is the post mortem. I've got into more trouble talking the game over afterwards than I ever did playing it . . . even with my own cards!

AL (*adding his argument*)

Yes, you shouldn't quarrel. Look at us—we've been pals for ten years, Jimmy and I, and we've never had words.

JIMMY

Al is right. A harmonious relationship is the finest thing in the world, Mrs. Barker. Don't dispute. After a game is over you should forget it. You should burn your bridges behind you.

AL

Sure! (*To* MR. BARKER.) Give the wife a kiss! (MR. BARKER *goes over to his* WIFE *to kiss her, and she melts forgivingly in his arms.*) That's very nice. That ought to be good for his non compos.

JIMMY (*preparing to go*)

Now we can say good night knowing that we leave a happy household behind us.

(*He and* AL *both bow.*)

MRS. BARKER
Good night. Good night, Mr. Wiggers. It's been delightful.

MR. BARKER
Give us a ring the next time you're in town.

AL (*puzzled, to* JIMMY)
Give them a ring? (*Stupidly.*) She's got a whole table full!

JIMMY
He means on the telephone, stupid! (*He pauses near the window.*) We should have won that last trick if my partner had played differently.

AL (*retorting quickly*)
How do you get like that?

JIMMY (*warmly*)
Common sense! You should have returned my last lead.

AL (*angrily*)
You think you're the only one who knows how to play this game!
(*He goes out through the window, followed by* JIMMY, *both gesticulating furiously.*)

JIMMY
Why didn't you, you dumb-bell?

AL (*loudly*)
How the hell was I to know he was out of hearts!

CURTAIN

SAMSON À LA MODE

A Comedy

by David Carb

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SAMSON À LA MODE

To bob or not to bob, that is the timely question which plays such an important part in Mr. Carb's play "Samson à la Mode." He has given us an up-to-the-minute comedy in which the older members of the Little Theatre will have as much chance to display their talents as the younger members. There will be no stumbling blocks in presenting the play either in the characters, which are well defined, or in the setting. The actor who plays Mr. Webb must be skillful in developing his rôle. He must steadily build from the meek henpecked husband of the first part of the play to the daring person of the climax who actually bobs his wife's hair. Mrs. Webb must be capable of dominating him completely until the last few moments when this modern Delilah capitulates.

PROPERTY LIST

For Mrs. Webb
- Box of roses
- Vase
- Shears
- Cards

For Mrs. Cutler
- Wrapped parcels

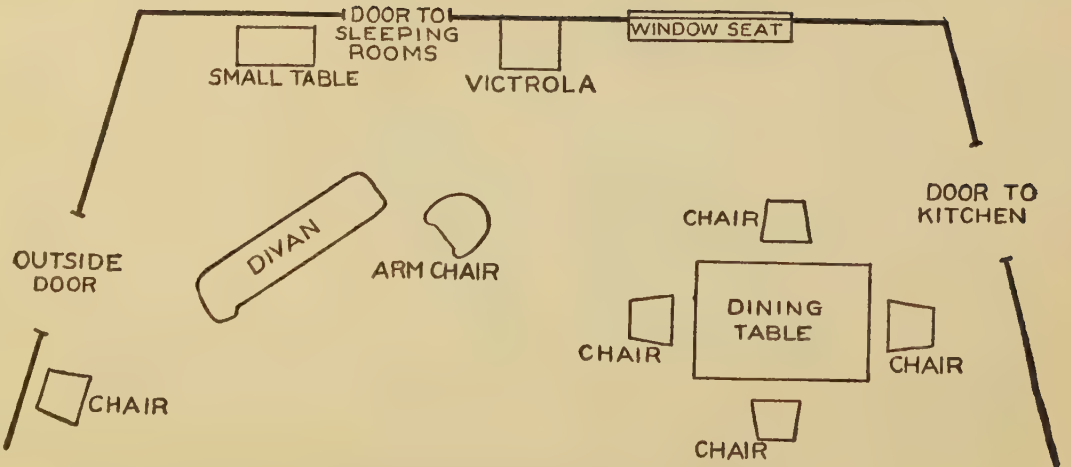
For Mrs. Fleming
- Wrapped parcels

Mr. Webb
- Bridge table

For Anita
- Dishes
- Cutlery
- Birthday cake

For Annie Louise
- Dishes

For Harold Bright
- Dishes



STAGE PLAN FOR "SAMSON A LA MODE"

SAMSON À LA MODE

CHARACTERS

HALSEY WEBB,	MARY FLEMING, *his wife*
BELLE WEBB, *his wife*	HAROLD BRIGHT
ANITA, *their daughter*	GLADYS CUTLER
JOHN FLEMING	ANNIE LOUISE, *her daughter*

SCENE: *The scene is the* WEBB *dining-living room, a pleasant, tasteful apartment furnished sparingly and comfortably. At the right is a door leading to the vestibule; there is a door in the rear somewhat to the right of center which leads to the sleeping rooms, and a third door, left, to the kitchen. The two windows in the back wall are hung with cheerful chintz curtains of the same pattern as the covering of the divan. A phonograph by the windows. A dining table downstage towards the left is the most conspicuous piece of furniture. The time is twilight of an autumn afternoon.*

AT RISE: *The rise of the curtain reveals* BELLE WEBB *at the table taking roses from a florist's box, trimming and arranging them in a vase. She uses a large pair of shears. A moment she is occupied thus, then there is a knock on the outer door and* MARY FLEMING *and* GLADYS CUTLER *enter without waiting to be invited in.*

MRS. WEBB
Oh, hello!

MRS. CUTLER
We just dropped in to show you something.

MRS. WEBB
A surprise? Oh, show me quick. I live for surprises.

MRS. CUTLER
Hold on. Hold on.
(*She switches on the lights.* MRS. FLEMING *has removed her hat.* MRS. WEBB *looks from one to the other.*)

MRS. WEBB
What is it?

MRS. CUTLER
Don't you *see?*

MRS. WEBB
See what? Oh, Mary!

MRS. FLEMING
Do you—do you like it?

MRS. CUTLER
Of course she does. Nobody could help liking it. I never knew anything to make such a change in a person.

MRS. FLEMING (*feebly*)
But what kind of change?

MRS. CUTLER
You look twenty years younger.

MRS. FLEMING
That would make me look sixteen.

MRS. CUTLER
Oh, you know what I mean.

MRS. WEBB
How'd you come to do it, Mary?

MRS. FLEMING
Why, I went with Gladys to get hers trimmed at Tony's

and all at once—I don't know—mine was off. Does it look —funny?

MRS. WEBB (*judicially*)
No—I wouldn't say funny. (*A brief silence.* MRS. FLEMING *is experiencing the aftermath of daring.*) What'll John say?

MRS. FLEMING
I—I don't know. That's what's—er—bothering me.

MRS. CUTLER
He'll have to take it cheerfully because there's nothing he can do about it. Belle, why don't you get yours bobbed?

MRS. WEBB
Me?

MRS. CUTLER
You're not so different from everybody else.

MRS. WEBB
Long hair's coming back.

MRS. FLEMING (*fearfully*)
Oh, do you think so?

MRS. CUTLER
Not for ages—if ever.

MRS. FLEMING
If it should—

MRS. WEBB
Well, you can let yours grow again, though it takes quite a time. There—don't worry. John won't mind.

MRS. CUTLER
Let him. Be a sport, Belle, try it on your husband, too.

MRS. WEBB
Lord, Halsey would—

MRS. CUTLER
He wouldn't say a thing or do a thing. You've got him tamed good and proper.

MRS. FLEMING
That's so, Belle, you have. I wish John was—

MRS. WEBB
May look that way in public but you don't know what goes on behind the scenes.

MRS. CUTLER
People act exactly as they've been rehearsed.

MRS. WEBB (*not at all pleased at the turn the conversation has taken*)
Now that I'm more used to it I sorter like it, Mary.

MRS. CUTLER
Then you do likewise.

MRS. WEBB
Anita's been bothering the life out of me to do it.

MRS. CUTLER
You'll be two to one. Halsey won't have a *chance*.

MRS. WEBB
She says I look more like her grandmother than her mother.

MRS. CUTLER
I don't know what young girls are coming to. The things Annie Louise says to me!

MRS. WEBB
All the more reason to be firm with them.

MRS. CUTLER
You can't oppose them in everything.

MRS. WEBB
You can keep your dignity.

MRS. CUTLER (*giggling*)
You can't keep what you haven't got.

MRS. WEBB
You *had* hair.

MRS. CUTLER
What's hair got to do with dignity?

MRS. WEBB (*with finality*)
A woman with a grown daughter ought to have full grown hair.
(HALSEY WEBB *enters wearing his hat.*)

WEBB
Who ought to—?

MRS. WEBB (*interrupting him*)
You're home early.

WEBB (*attempting merriment*)
It only seems so to—

MRS. WEBB
Don't you see anything unusual?

WEBB
Only Gladys and—

MRS. WEBB
Look again.

WEBB
And Mary. Why, Mary, what have you—?

MRS. WEBB
She's had her hair bobbed!

WEBB
By George! Stepping out, huh?

MRS. FLEMING
What—what do you think of it?

WEBB
Looks very—

MRS. WEBB
Becoming. He'd say that to you. But suppose *I* was to do it.

WEBB
That would—

MRS. WEBB
Be different. You see, I told you.

WEBB
But I didn't say—

MRS. WEBB
She'll forgive you this time.

WEBB
But I didn't mean—

MRS. WEBB
To keep your hat on in the house. (*Hastily he removes the forgotten article.*) If I didn't remind him he wouldn't remember to go to work or eat or anything.

WEBB
Oh, that's not fair, Belle. I remember—

MRS. WEBB
Is John like that?

MRS. FLEMING
Like what?

MRS. WEBB
Forgetful.

WEBB
But I'm *not*. Say, coming along the street I heard a good one. A woman said—

MRS. WEBB
This woman's saying: Do you know what day this is?

WEBB
Thursday. One woman says—

MRS. WEBB
It's my birthday.

WEBB
Oh!

MRS. CUTLER
Why, Belle! Let me congratulate you.
(*Kisses her.*)

MRS. FLEMING
Many, many more.
(*Kisses her.*)

WEBB
I'm sorry, Belle, I meant to—

MRS. WEBB
You did give me a present. Aren't they lovely? (*She indicates the roses.*) Of course, I had to buy them myself but you gave them to me just the same.

WEBB
Belle, I'm so sorry. (*She touches his cheek magnani-*

mously and the pique he has felt at her interruptions diminishes.) Say, we've got to celebrate. Let's have a party.

MRS. CUTLER
Oh, let's do.

MRS. FLEMING
When?

WEBB
Now—to-night—

MRS. FLEMING
Where?

MRS. CUTLER
At my house!

WEBB
The party should be where the birthday is and—

MRS. WEBB
Yes. It ought to be here.

MRS. CUTLER
I tell you. We'll have a cold supper. Come on, Mary. Let's collect the things.

MRS. WEBB
I can get cold things as well as you.

MRS. FLEMING
But we're giving this for you. You're the honoree.

MRS. WEBB
All right, then. But hurry. Halsey's hungry. Anita will be too when she comes home. Anita's out now buying some new records.

WEBB
Is she getting—?

MRS. WEBB
For my birthday present.
(*She laughs indulgently.*)

WEBB
Is she getting the one—

MRS. WEBB
He's just crazy about a weepy song he heard the other day. What's the name, Halsey?

WEBB
"When the—"

MRS. WEBB
Did you ever hear a sillier name?

MRS. FLEMING
We'd better be getting busy, Gladys.

MRS. CUTLER
Yes. We'll have to hustle.

WEBB
Maybe I could—

MRS. WEBB
No, Halsey. Nothing you can do. He'd just be in the way.

MRS. CUTLER
Be back before you know it.

MRS. WEBB (*as they go*)
Be sure and bring John and Annie Louise.

MRS. CUTLER (*over her shoulder*)
This party has a double purpose—to celebrate your birthday and Mary's bob. (*They disappear.*)

WEBB
Belle, I'm so—

MRS. WEBB
You always are.
(*She returns to the roses. A long pause.*)

WEBB
Belle, the joke I heard will make you scream. A woman remarks—

MRS. WEBB
Oh, ask the cook if there's plenty of ice and ginger ale.
(*He goes to the kitchen. Having finished with the roses,* MRS. WEBB *begins to tidy up the room.* WEBB *returns.*)

WEBB
There's only—

MRS. WEBB
I guess that'll be enough.

WEBB
Belle, I want to tell you—

MRS. WEBB
Oh, that reminds me. Did you—?

WEBB
Won't you ever let me finish a—

MRS. WEBB
Please don't interrupt. Did you go to the oculist?

WEBB
My eyes are all right.

MRS. WEBB
You'd better not put it off, dear. To-morrow.

WEBB
Not to-morrow nor the day after nor—

MRS. WEBB
Halsey, your collar's black. Go change it.

WEBB
I won't. (*He sits. She says nothing, continues to straighten up the room, comes to the chair he is occupying and works on that. He is forced to move. He sits on the divan. She forces him off that—quietly, seemingly abstractedly.*) Oh, all right.
(*He exits rear. She wipes off the table, picks up the shears. He calls.*)
Where are my collars?

MRS. WEBB (*laying down the shears*)
Oh, I moved them. They're in the second drawer.
(ANITA WEBB, ANNIE LOUISE CUTLER *and* HAROLD BRIGHT *enter from the street.* BRIGHT *is about eighteen, the two girls sixteen.*)

ANITA
We can have one dance before dinner.

ANNIE LOUISE
Happy birthday, Mrs. Webb.
(*Kisses her.*)

MRS. WEBB
Thanks, dear.

BRIGHT
Me, too.
(*Shakes hands.*)

MRS. WEBB
You're a sweet boy, Harold.

BRIGHT
I'm not.

MRS. WEBB
Not what?

BRIGHT
Sweet.
(*The girls giggle.* ANITA *has put the new record on the phonograph and started it.*)

ANITA
Come on, sweetie.

BRIGHT
Oh, you make me sick.
(*He starts for the door.* ANITA *catches him and makes him dance with her.*)

MRS. WEBB
That's not the record you said you were going to get—the one your father likes.

ANITA
This is snappier.

MRS. WEBB
Anita, let Harold dance with Annie Lou.

ANITA
The next one. Is father home? (*Calling.*) Father, come out here and dance with Annie Lou.

MRS. WEBB
Let your father alone.

ANITA
What's he doing?

MRS. WEBB
He doesn't want to dance. (WEBB *reënters, snapping his fingers to the beat of the music. He dances over to* ANNIE LOUISE, *takes her in his arms, and whirls her about.*) Halsey, where's your coat?

WEBB
Oh, I forgot to . . . (MRS. WEBB *glares at him, goes out rear and returns immediately with her husband's coat. She holds it for him, follows him about.*) Oh, Belle, put it down.

MRS. WEBB
Put it *on.*

ANITA
Mother, you're such a killjoy. If you'd dance once in a while it would—

MRS. WEBB
Put it on! (*Surlily he obeys.*) What would people think if—

ANNIE LOUISE
S'long, 'Nita.

ANITA (*stopping*)
Tsct! Oh, mother, why will you—?

MRS. WEBB
Your folks are coming here, Annie Lou. We're going to have a buffet supper.

ANITA
A party! Oh, joy.

BRIGHT
Maybe I'd better—

ANITA
Not if I know it.
(*She holds on to him.*)

WEBB
I invite—

MRS. WEBB
You're invited, Harold.
(*She goes out rear.* WEBB *walks upstage deliberately, turns off the phonograph and faces the three young people.*)

ANITA
Father, what's the—?

WEBB
Idea? I'll tell you. I want to tell you a joke.

ANITA
Save it—save it for the party. Let the music loose.

WEBB
Shut up.

ANITA
Why, father!

WEBB
Shut up! I've got something to say and by Heaven—

MRS. WEBB (*calling from offstage*)
Halsey!

WEBB
By Heaven, I'm going to—

MRS. WEBB
Halsey, come here a minute.

WEBB
To say it if it takes—

MRS. WEBB
Halsey, please.

WEBB
All the rest of—

MRS. WEBB (*returning*)
What are you doing?

WEBB (*weakening perceptibly*)
I was just about to tell the children about the woman who—

MRS. WEBB
Oh, that reminds me. Mrs. Fleming has had her hair cut off.

ANITA
Good for her.

BRIGHT
Who'd a thought a meek little thing like her—

ANNIE LOUISE
Sh—sh—sh.

MRS. WEBB
I wanted to warn you so you wouldn't be shocked or anything.

ANITA
Shocked! (*To her companions.*) Did you hear that? Shocked when a woman decides not to be an old stick-in-the-mud—

WEBB
Anita! It's your mother you're—

ANITA
Well, why doesn't she keep up with the procession?
(*A pause.*)

WEBB
I overheard a truckman telling this joke to—

MRS. WEBB
Your daughter must have heard them, too. She's adopted their manners.

WEBB
This'll give you a good laugh. It did me. He was telling his friend that a woman said—

MRS. WEBB
A woman said to another woman— You've been saying that ever since you're at home.

WEBB
Will you please let me tell it? She said to this other woman—

MRS. WEBB
Here comes the party. (MRS. CUTLER *and* MRS. FLEMING *return with many hastily wrapped parcels. Behind them is* JOHN FLEMING *with more.*) My, but you're back quick.

FLEMING
Many happy returns of the day.

WEBB
What do you think of your wife's—?

MRS. WEBB
Be still. (*To the others.*) Let's get the supper ready.

ANITA
You stay here. Harold and Annie Lou and I will fix everything.

MRS. WEBB
Why, the idea! They wouldn't know the first thing to do.

MRS. CUTLER
Let 'em try.
(*The others also urge that the young folk be permitted to prepare the supper.* MRS. WEBB *acquiesces.*)

ANITA
Load up.
(*She and her two companions relieve the* FLEMINGS *and* MRS. CUTLER *of their burdens and go into the kitchen.*)

WEBB
I never knew Anita—

MRS. WEBB
He thinks Anita is still a baby.

WEBB
I don't. I'm just surprised when—

MRS. WEBB
He's always saying: "Don't let her strain herself."

WEBB
I do not. I might, if I ever had a chance to get in a word edgewise but—

MRS. WEBB
Mary, do you have the same trouble with John?

MRS. FLEMING
What trouble?

MRS. WEBB
Halsey's always complaining that I talk too much.

WEBB
I never said that. What I said was—

MRS. WEBB
It amounts to the same thing.
(FLEMING *laughs.*)

WEBB
What you laughing at?

FLEMING
Nothing.
(*He and* MRS. CUTLER *exchange glances and chuckle.*)

WEBB
If you're laughing at—

MRS. WEBB
Why shouldn't he laugh at her? She was so afraid of what he'd do when he saw her without her hair that she was actually trembling. How does it feel to have some one so scared of you they don't dare *speak,* much less do anything on their own?

FLEMING
You ought to know.
(MRS. CUTLER *grins,* MRS. FLEMING *smiles.* WEBB *makes an angry movement but* MRS. WEBB'S *glance restrains him. An embarrassing silence.*)

WEBB
I heard a good one to-day. A woman said to—

MRS. WEBB
You must have been surprised, John, when you saw Mary's hair.

MRS. FLEMING (*adoringly*)
He just said: "Why didn't you do it long ago?"

FLEMING
You got to make the best of things. Only a cat can enjoy spilt milk.

MRS. CUTLER
You mean cats don't cry over spilt milk. Here, pussy, pussy—

FLEMING
Now just who are you calling?

MRS. CUTLER
The one that answers.
(*A general laugh.*)

FLEMING
As a matter of fact, I wasn't surprised when I saw her. I went to Tony's to get my hair bobbed—both of them—and he told me he had just operated on the missus.

MRS. FLEMING
Did you lose your temper?

FLEMING
No—fifty cents. I knew you hadn't tipped him.
(*Another general laugh.*)

MRS. WEBB
What'll we do after supper?

MRS. CUTLER
The children will want to dance.

FLEMING
Let's have a little bridge game.

MRS. FLEMING
There are five of us and you don't like to cut in, John. I'll stay out.

MRS. WEBB
Halsey doesn't care about bridge.

WEBB
Why, Belle! I do. I'm terribly keen—

MRS. WEBB
He's terribly keen for poker—says bridge is tame.

WEBB (*emphatically*)
I never did!

MRS. WEBB
Me—I'm different. Bridge is full of surprises and I live for surprises. (WEBB *glares at her and the glimmer of a resolution comes to him.*) Halsey likes the expected.

WEBB (*mumbling*)
All right—all right. See if I do.

MRS. WEBB
What's that? He's getting into the most awful habit of muttering to himself.

FLEMING
The mutt mutters.
(*That evokes laughter from all but* WEBB. *It is evident that the little circle considers* FLEMING *comical, so whatever he says is greeted as comedy.*)

WEBB
Now, listen here. I'm tired of—

MRS. WEBB
Oh, poor boy. Well, you can take a nice nap while we're having our game.

WEBB
I don't want a nap.

FLEMING
Try a snooze instead.
(*Again laughter.*)

WEBB
I don't see anything funny in that.

MRS. CUTLER
What care I how funny it be so it be not funny to me?

WEBB
I'll tell you something that's really funny. A woman—

MRS. WEBB
Get the bridge table, dear.

FLEMING
Ha, ha. That was a scream. (WEBB *glares at them, fetches the bridge table.* MRS. WEBB *gets the cards.*) Reminds me of a story I heard the other day. One Irishman asked another—

WEBB
Oh, I know that one.

MRS. WEBB (*severely*)
Halsey, you're interrupting!

WEBB
Oh, am I?

MRS. WEBB
Go on, John.

FLEMING
Let's have a rubber now. I'll tell the story to distract you when you're playing against me.

MRS. CUTLER
Come on. One rubber before supper.

MRS. WEBB (*calling*)
Anita, are you nearly ready?

ANITA (*from the kitchen*)
In ten minutes. The coffee's just starting to perk.

FLEMING (*spreading the cards*)
Draw for partners.
(WEBB *attempts to draw a card.*)

MRS. WEBB
Why, I thought you didn't want to play.

WEBB
You thought so but *I* didn't.
(*They all draw.*)

FLEMING
High man out. That's you, Gladys.

MRS. WEBB
Take my place, Gladys.

MRS. CUTLER
Oh, I wouldn't think of it.

MRS. WEBB
I'd better see how the children are getting on.

WEBB
I don't really care about playing.
(*His wife smiles at him.*)

FLEMING
Belle, you and Gladys and Mary and I. (*They dispose themselves at the table.* MRS. WEBB *deals.* FLEMING *reaches over and rumples* MARY'S *hair.*) Will crops be good and not over-bid? (*Laughter.*)

MRS. CUTLER
She's not crops; she's shingles.
(WEBB *paces the room.*)

MRS. WEBB
One spade.

FLEMING
No trump.
(ANITA *enters with cutlery and dishes.*)

ANITA
Bridge, before supper! I never knew such fiends. Father, why aren't you playing?

WEBB
Only four can play bridge.

ANITA
So as usual you're the odd man. Will you help me? (*He assists her.*) Father, why do you put up with it?

WEBB
Put up with what, Anita?

ANITA
You know very well what I mean. If you'd stand up for your rights once in a while everybody would have more respect for you.

WEBB
Haven't you any respect for me?

ANITA
Not much. But I love you. (*Kisses him.*) Will you put these shears somewhere? (*She hands them to him but as he is moving away her voice calls him back.*) Mother doesn't realize how she embarrasses you.

WEBB
I used to think that.

ANITA
You think she does it on purpose! (*He says nothing.*) If that's so you've got to cure her! And now—this very minute!

WEBB
How?

ANITA
If you don't know how then you don't deserve any better treatment.
(*There is contempt in her tone.* WEBB *squirms. She goes back to the kitchen.*)

MRS. WEBB
Halsey, get us some paper and a pencil. (*He makes a move to obey, then suddenly braces himself and makes a resolve. He strides upstage and starts the victrola.*) For Heaven's sake!

WEBB
Ta-ta, tum-ta-ta.

MRS. WEBB
Shut that off.

WEBB
I like it. Tum-ta-ta-tum.

MRS. WEBB
How can we play bridge if—?

WEBB
I don't care whether you play bridge or not. I'm having a good time. Ta-ta-tum-ta-ta. (*The game stops.*)

MRS. CUTLER
Why, what's got into him?

FLEMING
Razz—jazz—

MRS. WEBB
Halsey, will you stop that—

WEBB (*seizing her*)
Come, trip the light fantastic.

MRS. WEBB (*attempting to free herself*)
Are you crazy? Let me go.

WEBB
Ta-tum-ta-tum— Hey, that's my foot.

MRS. WEBB (*brings her foot down on his*)
So is that.

WEBB
Ouch.
(*But he continues to drag her about.*)

MRS. WEBB
And that and that and that. (*Still he persists.*) Halsey!

WEBB
Yes, my dear? Ta-tum-tee—

MRS. WEBB
Will you—

WEBB
Whirl you faster? Yes, my dear. Whatever you say. (*And he proceeds to whirl her dizzily.* ANITA *enters with a birthday cake bright with lighted candles. Following her come* ANNIE LOUISE *and* BRIGHT, *bearing dishes. They are astonished as are the older guests.* ANITA *sets the cake on the table, stops the victrola. The sudden silence affects* WEBB, *he releases his wife and then, fearful of the consequences of his action, regards her timorously. She is breathing heavily, as much from amazement and indignation as from the unwonted exercise. After a moment during which she has glared at him she approaches him slowly, awesomely.*)

ANITA (*loudly*) Supper's ready. (*That breaks the tension. Everybody except* MR. *and* MRS. WEBB *laugh and chatter, as they approach the table.* ANITA *comes close to her mother and speaks in an incisive whisper.*) Snap out of it, Mother. You're hostess.

MRS. WEBB
Oh! (*To her guests.*) I'm breathless. (*They snicker at the double implication.*) John, sit by me. Mary at my

left. Harold between the two girls. (MRS. WEBB *sits facing the audience. When the others are seated the chair opposite her is still waiting for* WEBB.) Come on, Halsey. (*He takes his place.*)

FLEMING
I like sudden—er—parties like this.

MRS. WEBB
So do I. I live for surprises.

MRS. CUTLER
Your life must be overflowing to-night.
(*A long pause. Suddenly* WEBB *becomes animated.*)

WEBB
I was about to tell you—

MRS. WEBB
I was telling Halsey just the other day that I must learn the new dances, so he decided to teach me.

ANITA
Dances and other things.

MRS. WEBB
What did you say, dear?

WEBB
She said—

MRS. WEBB
Well, it doesn't matter.

WEBB
She said you must learn to dance and—

MRS. WEBB
Yes. That's what I was saying. (WEBB *rises from the table.*) Where are you going, dear? (*He opens his*

mouth to speak but she anticipates him.) Don't do it now. It can wait.

WEBB (*suddenly bursting forth shrilly*)
I *will* do it now. It's waited too long already. Now you listen to me—all of you—you too. I've got something to say.
(*He pauses.*)

MRS. WEBB
Why, Halsey! What is it?

WEBB
What it is doesn't matter. Getting it said does. (*Again he pauses.*) A woman said to—

MRS. WEBB
Oh, that old joke again.
(*He comes up behind her, presses his hand over her mouth, her head against his coat. Her effort to free herself results in several hairpins falling to the floor.*)

WEBB
This woman said—

MRS. WEBB
Halsey! My hair's coming down. How could you?

MRS. CUTLER
If it was bobbed—
(*That gives* WEBB *his idea. He stares at the meek* MRS. FLEMING, *takes a deep breath, reaches to a nearby lamp-rest where he had placed the shears, seizes them, catches his wife's hair and with one whack severs the queue from her head. The company gasp.* MRS. WEBB *slowly feels her head, gazes at the hair in* WEBB'S *hand, then into his determined eyes. A long silence.*)

MRS. CUTLER
She lives for surprises.

WEBB (*slowly, forcefully*)

One woman said to another: "My husband never gives me a short answer." "Yes," the other said, "MY *husband talks a lot, too.*" (*The long delayed story produces no reaction in any one except* MRS. WEBB. *She laughs.*)

MRS. WEBB

That's awfully funny, dear.

(WEBB *resumes his seat.*)

WEBB

May I have some ham? This morning when I got to the office I found my stenographer hadn't come in yet. It was nine-thirty. So I left a note on her desk—I had an appointment with Bert Jenkins at ten—and wrote in the note . . . (*He is talking to an attentive audience as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS.)

THE WARRIOR'S HUSBAND

A Mythological Farce

by Julian F. Thompson

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JULIAN THOMPSON

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THE WARRIOR'S HUSBAND

Julian F. Thompson's "The Warrior's Husband" enables producers of one-act plays to enjoy the latest vogue in literature and drama. This new style places modern ideas phrased in colloquial English in the mouths of famous historical and mythical characters. While the idea is intrinsically humorous, Mr. Thompson's hilarious farce dealing with Amazon warriors becomes doubly entertaining because it is treated in this new manner. To make the incongruity more startling the director should see that the costumes are historically correct and not burlesqued in the slightest degree. The performance should be vigorous, but the actors should be reminded that the more seriously a farce is played the funnier it is to an audience. The set may be an elaborate one or a very simple one with only a modernistic suggestion of the front of the tent, trees and rock placed before a cyclorama of drapes, the major effect being created by lights.

PROPERTY LIST

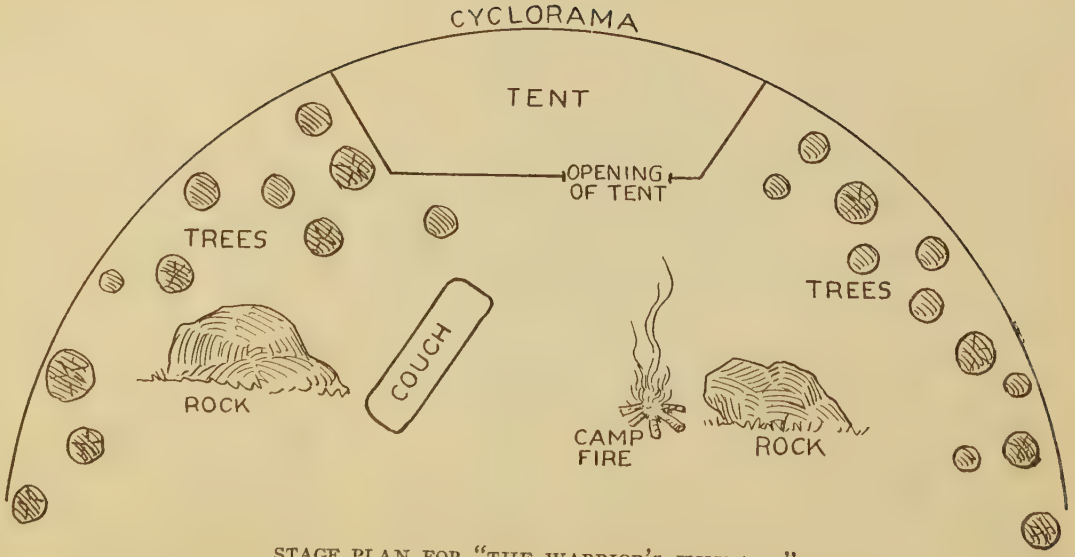
For Homo
- Mirror of polished silver

For Antiope
- Earthenware bowl
- Skin container for water
- Girdle
- Swords and shield
- Thongs

For Buria
- Hippolyte's armor and helmet

For Hippolyte
- Girdle

For Theseus
- Sword and shield



STAGE PLAN FOR "THE WARRIOR'S HUSBAND"

THE WARRIOR'S HUSBAND

CHARACTERS

HIPPOLYTE, *the heroic queen of the Amazons*
HOMO, *her husband*
ANTIOPE, *sister of Hippolyte, a fearless warrior*
BURIA, *an aged Amazon, now armor-bearer to Hippolyte*
HERCULES, *the strongest man in the world*
THESEUS, *Greek hero and companion in adventure to Hercules*
A GRECIAN HERALD
AN AMAZON SENTINEL

The action occurs about the tent of HIPPOLYTE, *in a forest on the frontier of the land of the Amazons, where the Amazon army is now encamped. The front of the tent is seen thrown open, and before it on a couch rests the beautiful languid form of* HOMO. HIPPOLYTE *is a great, vain creature, a Diana with two massive braids of fair hair.* HOMO *is slender and far from muscular. He has a black, silken beard, beautifully curled, and with his delicate features, he looks like an ancient Egyptian bas-relief. He is exquisitely clothed in a silken tunic of purple and white and gold. His black hair falls just to his shoulders, and is held in place by a golden fillet. He has a mirror of highly polished silver, into which he gazes intermittently. He is in a pettish mood just now.* HIPPOLYTE *strides back and forth, in deep thought, paying little attention to him.*

HOMO (*watches her a moment and then starts in exasperated voice*)
Hippolyte, will you *please* listen? I don't think it's fair. We've hardly been married a year and you don't pay any attention to me. You wanted to come out here to the frontier and fight the Greek army and didn't want to take me with you or anything.

HIPPOLYTE (*sick of his nagging, shouting*)
Am I queen of the Amazons or am I not?

HOMO (*almost in tears*)
Any one would think I was your slave instead of your husband, from the way you treat me.

HIPPOLYTE
Oh, I should have left you at home with the men and the children. Now see here, dear, this is war. This crazy army composed of *men* is attacking us. My women warriors have got to defend their country, though Zeus knows they feel ashamed to raise their hands against men.

HOMO (*whimpering*)
That's just it. You don't think men are good for anything. You treat me as if I were a doll and was only something to be petted and played with. Men have just as good minds as women but you won't let us develop ourselves. Look at the Greeks. Their men fight in the armies even—and Antiope tells me that their men ride horseback astride—and you insist that I have to ride sidesaddle.

HIPPOLYTE
Of course you have to ride sidesaddle! Why, every woman in the army would blush at the sight of you. It isn't decent and it would only attract attention.

HOMO (*being naughty*)
Well, for that matter it might not be entirely unpleasant to have some one pay a little attention to me.

HIPPOLYTE (*suddenly*)
As a matter of fact, I noticed yesterday that some of our young warriors were staring at you.

HOMO
I can't help my looks, can I? It isn't my fault if I happen to be physically attractive!

HIPPOLYTE (*flaring up*)
Now see here, my dear . . .
(*A sound of cow horns is heard;* BURIA *runs in.*)

BURIA
Hippolyte, a herald is coming from the Greek army to speak to you—a man—will you see him?

HIPPOLYTE
Send him here—wait! Where is my sister, Antiope?

BURIA
I just saw her with some of the women, throwing dice.

HIPPOLYTE
Send her to me first. (*Exit* BURIA.) Antiope, a princess, throwing dice with common soldiers! It's about time she was learning a little dignity.

HOMO
She's the most popular captain you have, and the best fighter, too. It's too bad you haven't more like her.

HIPPOLYTE (*sarcastic*)
Well, well, how long have you been her champion?

HOMO (*provokingly*)
I'm afraid to tell you. It might make you jealous.
(ANTIOPE, *a glorious young Amazon, clean-limbed and powerful, comes running and leaping in.*)

ANTIOPE
Hello, sister, what is it? I hear there's a Grecian herald coming.

HIPPOLYTE
Antiope, I hear you were rolling dice with your inferiors.

ANTIOPE
Oh, Hades, now don't start that. You're getting to be a regular old grandfather. What's the news?

HIPPOLYTE (*continuing*)
It mustn't happen again, do you hear? You are a princess, and must behave as one.

BURIA (*enters running*)
The Grecian herald, Hippolyte.
(*Amazon warriors enter escorting a Greek soldier. The Amazons group themselves about* HIPPOLYTE'S *tent, where she and* ANTIOPE *stand.*)

HERALD
I come, Hippolyte, from yonder host,
To tell you that they are led by Hercules,
Fair son of Zeus, and strongest living man;
(*A murmur of amazement in the crowd.*)
And with him Theseus, by the gods beloved,
The greatest warrior in Attica.
Doubtless you have not heard that Hercules
In penance for some vagaries of youth
Was ordered by the gods to consummate
Twelve mighty labors. Eight are done and he
Has caught the Cretan bull which Theseus killed.
Has slaughtered the Lernean Hydra which
Had terrified the world for centuries,
Diomedes' man-eating mares were tamed,
And now another labor brings him here
To gain the girdle of Hippolyte.

ANTIOPE

Ha! The others were beasts. He has a woman to contend with now.

HERALD (*to* ANTIOPE)

I wish you wouldn't keep interrupting me. I have trouble enough remembering this speech without being interrupted all the time.

ANTIOPE

Does every one talk that way in Greece?

HERALD

I'll admit it sounds rather flowery, but we have a young war correspondent with us named Homer, and he wrote it and was very particular I should get it right. Kept me up till after dark last night practicing it.

HIPPOLYTE (*to* ANTIOPE)

Where are your manners? Remember, he is a man, even if he is an enemy. (*To* HERALD.) Go on.

HERALD (*To* HIPPOLYTE)

That's very kind of you, I'm sure. Now let's see, where was I? He comes—he comes—oh, yes— And now another labor brings him here to gain the girdle of Hippolyte. Ahem! No—yes—yes—that's it. Ahem! Girdle of Hippolyte.

And so, great Hercules doth challenge her
To single combat lasting half a day
And vows to Mars that he will bite the dust
Or win the girdle as the gods command.

HIPPOLYTE

The fool—doesn't he know this girdle was given our foremothers by Diana with the promise that so long as it stayed in Pontus, woman should rule and be victorious in arms? Where will he meet me?

HERALD
He will meet you between the two encampments.

HIPPOLYTE
Tell him I'll come at once—and hurry, or I'll catch him unprepared.

HERALD
He stipulates you wear the real girdle and bring your warriors to watch the fight. The Grecian army will be on the other side and both will see that justice is upheld.

HIPPOLYTE
Good! (*Exit* HERALD.) Quick, Buria, my armor! Order the entire Amazon army to draw up beside the field of battle.

ANTIOPE
Well, things are waking up a little. I haven't seen a good fight for ages.

HIPPOLYTE (*smiling proudly as she puts on armor*)
I hate to do it. It's an uneven fight, a man against a woman, but he's brought it on himself.

HOMO
I wouldn't be so sure—I've heard those Greeks are very treacherous.

HIPPOLYTE (*sneering*)
Treacherous! (*She changes.*) I'd hate to lose this girdle through some treachery. Antiope, you put it on and give me yours, then you can stay back here and keep it safe.

ANTIOPE
Oh, sister! I want to see the fight.

HIPPOLYTE (*taking off girdle*)
No, you will stay here with the girdle. Give me yours.

ANTIOPE (*giving her girdle and taking* HIPPOLYTE'S)
Oh, Hades, you make me tired. I want to see the fight. There's no danger fighting men.

HIPPOLYTE
Take it! You need a little discipline anyway to teach you not to roll dice with common Amazons. Come, Buria. Is my helmet on straight? Well, I'm off.
(*Attendants follow her off.*)

HOMO
Hippolyte.

HIPPOLYTE (*stopping*)
Yes.

HOMO (*injured voice*)
Hippolyte!

HIPPOLYTE (*impatient*)
Well, what's the matter now?

HOMO (*cloyingly sweet*)
You've forgotten something.

HIPPOLYTE (*very bored*)
What is it?

HOMO
You forgot to kiss me.

HIPPOLYTE
Oh!
(*Goes over and kisses him hurriedly and runs off.* ANTIOPE *laughs heartily.*)

HOMO (*sniffling*)
She—she never considers me any more. It never occurred to her to kiss me good-by.

ANTIOPE
Why, she's only going to fight a man. It'll be a shame to use two hands to it.

HOMO
I—I—I—almost think she doesn't love me any more.

ANTIOPE
What? Oh, come, come. She doesn't beat you or anything like that, does she?

HOMO
Oh, no, but I—I have a very affectionate nature—and I—I'm starving.

ANTIOPE (*alarmed*)
Well—I—I—don't think Hippolyte ought to let you starve. If—if I can do anything.

HOMO (*coy*)
Oh, Antiope, don't be silly!

ANTIOPE (*more alarmed*)
Oh—oh, I mean—to make Hippolyte realize. She—she's so used to you she probably doesn't realize how beautiful and dainty you are.

HOMO (*very sweet*)
Thank you. I'm glad *you* think so, at least. But it doesn't do me much good, does it?

ANTIOPE (*growing bolder*)
It might have done you some good—if you hadn't married my sister—

HOMO (*quickly*)
But it's too late now. I'm a settled married man. Come here and sit down.

ANTIOPE (*looks at him and rubs nose, perplexed*)
No, I think I'd better not.

HOMO (*pouting*)
I thought so—you don't think I'm attractive.

ANTIOPE
Now see here, Homo. I'm just a plain warrior. I've never had much to do with men because I was more interested in fighting, so perhaps I don't understand your ways. I'm used to plain talk and to people saying what they mean. Now, if you're trying to tell me that you'd like to flirt with me, let's say so frankly and go into it with open eyes.

HOMO (*throws back his head and laughs merrily*)
Oh, you rough soldiers are amusing! You must spend more time in town and get polished up a little. You're still a big, awkward overgrown girl. (*Laughs again.*) Come and sit down!

ANTIOPE
Are you flirting with me, or not?

HOMO
Well, what if I am?

ANTIOPE (*goes and sits down beside him*)
Now, what do I do?

HOMO
Well, you are an innocent child, aren't you? Don't you know how to flatter men with pretty speeches?

ANTIOPE
I—I never have done much of that. I never seem to know how to treat a man.

HOMO (*laughing seductively*)
You poor girl—you must surely spend more time in Pontus and learn the ways of the court.

(*He reaches out and puts his hand between the hands of* ANTIOPE, *who shows considerable embarrassment.*)

ANTIOPE
I—I've never held a man's hand before.

HOMO
Aren't you strong and powerful—what fierce, muscular hands!

ANTIOPE
You—you're so frail and fragrant.

HOMO
Do you like that about me?

ANTIOPE (*ardently*)
Oh, yes, it's so manly—and your delicate body—you seem so helpless and so in need of protection and all that.

HOMO (*smiling*)
I'm glad you like my perfume. It comes all the way from Abyssinia. One little phial contains a thousand crushed roses. Isn't it queer? They say that in Abyssinia the women put perfume on themselves.

ANTIOPE (*disgustedly*)
They'd better not let me see them! That's horrible! It's positively degenerate!

HOMO (*smiling and passing his hand under her nose*)
But you don't exactly mind it on men?

ANTIOPE (*intoxicated*)
Oh, no! It's wonderful! You're an exquisite creature. Your beard is beautiful. It curls so beautifully.

HOMO (*smiling*)
My dear girl, I hate to disillusion you, but the curl isn't

natural. That's the newest thing—the Egyptian curl. It's being carved into all their statuary nowadays.

ANTIOPE
Oh, I don't care. It's beautiful.

HOMO (*sighing*)
Aren't you wonderful!

ANTIOPE (*drawing his hand close to her*)
It's you who are wonderful.

HOMO (*very languid*)
Oh, no, no, no.

ANTIOPE (*is on fire*)
Homo, I—I—
(*She suddenly seizes him in her arms and starts to kiss him.*)

HOMO (*frightened and resisting*)
No, no, Antiope, not that!

ANTIOPE (*overcoming him*)
Yes, I will—I will!

HOMO (*resisting*)
No!
(ANTIOPE, *however, is much stronger and finally draws him to her and kisses him ardently—holding him close to her.* HOMO—*finding resistance useless, ceases struggling and something more than submits to the kiss. It is growing in intensity, when suddenly he becomes perfectly limp in her arms, his head falling back.*)

ANTIOPE (*holds him in amazement, puts her hand to his heart and looks half amused, half disgusted*)
By Zeus! he's fainted. (*In utter disgust.*) Oh, these men!

(She becomes rather alarmed lest she be seen, glances furtively about and then picks him up and carries him into his tent. As she approaches the tent, BURIA, *returning on some mission, enters and sees* ANTIOPE *carry* HOMO *into the tent, but is not seen by* ANTIOPE. BURIA, *greatly shocked, turns and runs offstage in the direction she has come.* ANTIOPE *comes out hurriedly with an earthenware bowl and empties water into it from a skin. She is about to reënter when she suddenly stops, having evidently heard some sound offstage. She listens attentively and sees some one coming. She quickly lowers the flaps of the tent and runs offstage.* THESEUS *enters from amongst the trees and rocks, peering about cautiously and trying to avoid making any sound. He spies the tent, starts, gets behind a great rock and watches it carefully. He evidently concludes no one is there, and motions for some one else to join him and calls, in a subdued voice.)*

THESEUS

Hercules! Hercules! (HERCULES *enters, a huge, awkward, very fleshy man, evidently very frightened, wheezing as he breathes, and trying, unsuccessfully, to move without noise. He stumbles on a stick, which breaks, crashing loudly, and becomes more terrified than ever.* THESEUS *motions vigorously to him to keep still. They watch the tent some time in silence.)* I don't think there's any one there. Let's go see.

HERCULES

Now, wait a minute. You're too reckless, Theseus.

THESEUS

Oh, you make me sick!

HERCULES

I don't care. We're right in their encampment, now. If we stumble into a lot of them, they'd cut us to pieces.

THESEUS

But you can see there's nobody here. Our plan has worked perfectly. The whole Amazon army is out there with their queen waiting for you to come out and fight—and you don't come.

HERCULES

But I think she'll have the girdle on—

THESEUS

Never! I had the herald tell her particularly that you were coming for the girdle as one of your labors—and had him stipulate that she would wear it in the fight.

HERCULES

Well then, she's sure to have worn it.

THESEUS

You don't know women. Having been told that, she's sure to have left it behind in her tent—and that's why we're here—if we can be sure which is her tent.

HERCULES

I know, but I don't like the looks of this. I think I'll go back.

THESEUS

Well, take your choice. If you go back, you'll have to fight her.

HERCULES (*is very distressed*)

I wish I'd never been born! I wish I'd never strangled that python in my cradle! I've had to live up to that reputation ever since. I'm always getting into trouble!

THESEUS

You're a great big coward, that's what you are! We've got a good chance of getting the girdle this way without

any fight. That's what you wanted, isn't it? If this doesn't work, we'll fight afterward.

HERCULES (*whining*)
I'm not as afraid of wild animals as I am of women. They're treacherous, I tell you.

THESEUS
It's a lucky thing for you I love adventure. If you didn't have me going around with you, doing your labors and telling everybody you were the strongest man in the world, you'd never get through.

HERCULES (*very submissive*)
Well—well—what are you going to do next?

THESEUS
We're going to search that tent.

HERCULES
Are you? Very well.

THESEUS
We are! Now, come on—softly!
(THESEUS *starts stealthily toward the tent.* HERCULES *starts behind him very frightened and holding his sword gingerly. Suddenly he emits a loud cry and seizes one of his feet.*)

HERCULES
Ooo! Ouch!

THESEUS
Sh! Be quiet.

HERCULES (*complaining loudly*)
Ow! A thorn stuck in my foot.
(ANTIOPE *enters suddenly with sword drawn. She stops and looks at the pair in amazement. Both Greeks stand ready for attack. She speaks quickly.*)

ANTIOPE
Who are you?

THESEUS (*at once, with fire*)
I am Theseus, greatest of Attic warriors.

ANTIOPE (*scornfully, to Hercules*)
And who are you?
(HERCULES, *terribly frightened, stands first on one foot and then on the other, wets his lips repeatedly but cannot speak.*)

THESEUS
Know, fair Amazon, that he is Hercules, strongest man in the world!

ANTIOPE
What are you doing here? Have you killed Hippolyte?

HERCULES (*finds his voice*)
Oh, now, don't get excited, we haven't even seen Hippolyte. We—we—we don't—we—
(*Words fail him.*)

THESEUS (*blandly filling in*)
We didn't want to hurt her, but we do want her girdle, so we thought perhaps you could tell us where to find it.

HERCULES (*brightening up*)
Yes, be a good girl and tell us where it is. I have gold enough to buy—

ANTIOPE (*blazing with anger*)
Trickery, is it! Well! You're the biggest one, I'll take you first.
(*She starts at him with a rush.* HERCULES, *panic-stricken, lets out a bellow, turns and flees with* ANTIOPE *close behind him.* THESEUS, *left alone on the stage, bursts into peals of laughter.* HERCULES *again enters, on the run,*

hesitates, not knowing where to go—looks back and flees off opposite side of stage. ANTIOPE *follows on and off in close pursuit.* THESEUS *laughs even harder. After a brief space,* HERCULES *again enters on the run and very much out of breath.*)

HERCULES
Help me, Theseus! Where shall I go?

THESEUS (*still laughing and pointing*)
In the tent!
(HERCULES *at once dodges inside the tent and is no sooner out of sight than* ANTIOPE *again enters on the run. She has lost track of him and looks in every direction, not knowing which way to go.* THESEUS *still stands by, laughing for joy.*)

ANTIOPE
Well, what are you laughing at? (THESEUS *still laughs on.*) I suppose you'll run, too.
(*She prepares to attack him.*)

THESEUS (*stops laughing, but stands waiting for her with a tolerant smile.*)
Come and find out.
(*Without a moment's hesitation,* ANTIOPE *charges him and he stands and meets her attack. They fight about the stage with short swords and shields. They are about an even match.* ANTIOPE *moves like lightning, but the smile stays on* THESEUS' *face, which infuriates her. In a close mixup, both become disarmed, whereupon they throw away their cumbersome shields and start to fight with their fists. Finally,* ANTIOPE *hits him a full blow on the jaw and* THESEUS *falls stunned.* ANTIOPE *at once recovers her sword and goes back to him to kill him. She is about to plunge the sword into him when she stops—evidently in admiration of his beauty. She has never seen this kind of man before. She reaches down and feels the muscles of*

his arm; then admires his face. Brushing the hair back from his brow, she is seen to sigh. Then she stands again looking at him—evidently deciding what to do; then has an idea and turns back to the front of the tent and gets some thongs hanging there, with which to bind him. As her back is turned, THESEUS *regains consciousness again and leaps up suddenly and starts for her. She sees him just in time to meet him and they clinch in another struggle. Each tries to trip or throw the other. Failing, they separate—out of breath—and each waiting for the other to move.*)

ANTIOPE (*suddenly has an idea*)
Oh, I know how to overcome a man! Kiss him! (*She charges him again. She throws one arm about his waist and with the other hand seizes him by the hair and draws him to her until she has him close. Then she pulls his head forward and puts her lips to his. Thus they both stand, feet and muscles braced in a warlike kiss. It does not seem to have the effect on* THESEUS *that it did on* HOMO. ANTIOPE *draws her head away and looks at him. He laughs. This angers her.*) What, you haven't had enough, eh? Then take some more of it! (*And she renews the kiss. For a time, both stand lips together and every muscle tense. Then, very slowly, scarcely perceptibly at first,* ANTIOPE'S *warlike pose begins to relax.* THESEUS *becomes the aggressor in this novel warfare and draws her close, resisting less and less. Finally, her hand, which was gripping his hair, lets go and her arm goes about his neck and her surrender is complete.*)

THESEUS (*now breaks the kiss, saying with a victorious smile*)
Well, have *you* had enough yet?

ANTIOPE (*smiles up at him, star-eyed and radiant*)
I don't believe I ever shall.

THESEUS (*kisses her again then*)
Oh, by the way, who are you?

ANTIOPE
Antiope, sister to Hippolyte.

THESEUS
I might have known. Zeus, but you are beautiful!
(*A cow horn is heard blown in the distance.*)

ANTIOPE (*draws away quickly*)
Oh, that's Hippolyte's horn. She must be coming back. What shall we do?

THESEUS
Come back to camp with me.

ANTIOPE
Oh! Never!

THESEUS
Please come!

ANTIOPE
It would be desertion. It would be treacherous of me.

THESEUS
But—but—I—won't leave you.

ANTIOPE
I don't want you to leave me, but if you stay here, they'll kill you.

THESEUS
What shall we do?

ANTIOPE
Stupid! I am your prisoner of war. You have just overcome me—by force of arms.

THESEUS
Yes, I know, but what of that?

ANTIOPE
Why, you can do what you like with your prisoners. (*She holds out her arms to him.*) If you should carry me off against my will, I wouldn't be a deserter.
(*A cow horn is again heard much nearer. Without a word,* THESEUS *picks her up unresisting and throwing her across his shoulder, runs off. For a moment the stage is deserted.*
HOMO *and* HERCULES *peek out of the tent. Seeing no one, they venture forth.*)

HERCULES
Are they gone?

HOMO (*looking off*)
Yes—Hm! He has *his* hands full. (*A cow horn is heard near at hand.*) Oh, that's Hippolyte's horn— Oh, if she ever finds out what—

HERCULES
Oh, is she coming? Where can I hide? I'll go with Theseus— Oh, some Amazons are coming from that direction, too. Oh! Oh, I can't escape—I'm surrounded! What shall I do?

HOMO
Are you afraid of women, too?

HERCULES
Oh, yes, terribly!

HOMO
So am I. If I could only escape to Greece with you— Ah, I have an idea—quick—come in the tent— Here they come.
(*Both dodge into tent. Then* HIPPOLYTE *enters on run, followed by* BURIA *and numerous Amazons.*)

HIPPOLYTE (*in a rage*)
Not into my own tent!

BURIA
Yes, Hippolyte. Antiope seemed to be fairly carrying Homo in.

HIPPOLYTE (*starting toward tent*)
My own sister! By the heavens above she shall pay for this! Homo! Are you in there?

HOMO'S VOICE (*very calm*)
Yes, Hippolyte.

HIPPOLYTE
And is Antiope in there, too?

HOMO
No, Hippolyte, she is not. I'm surprised at your suggesting such a thing. I have very bad news for you about Antiope.

HIPPOLYTE
What do you mean—come out here, you little rascal. I know what you're up to.

AMAZON WARRIOR (*rushes on*)
Hippolyte! Hippolyte! I just saw Antiope being carried into the Greek lines by a man!

HIPPOLYTE
What! Antiope captured by a man! Impossible! Was she fighting?

AMAZON
No, Hippolyte. She was lying, thrown across his shoulders.

HOMO'S VOICE
Now do you believe me? And do you realize what that

means? The girdle that gave women power in politics is gone.

HIPPOLYTE (*suddenly realizing*)
Gone! Oh, woe, woe!

AMAZONS
Oh, woe, woe.

HOMO'S VOICE
And do you realize what that means? Your power is gone. Now I am boss! From the moment that girdle went into Greek hands I have become all powerful! I have grown two feet! Why, I could break you across my knee like a twig.

HIPPOLYTE
What! Why you little snail. You little liar. I believe you're responsible for the whole thing. Come out here and I'll give you a good spanking.

HOMO'S VOICE
Oh, you will, will you. Very well, I will come out. But remember I warned you that I have your power now!

HIPPOLYTE
Yes, yes, I know! Come on out!
(HERCULES, *dressed in* HOMO'S *scanty toga, is pushed out of the tent and stands looking at them.* HIPPOLYTE *lets out one squawk and faints. The Amazons all flee.*)
(HOMO *dressed in* HERCULES' *furs and carrying his club, enters in glee.*)

HOMO
Attaboy! Now for Greece.
(*And they exit.*)

CURTAIN

AMBUSH

A Farce Comedy

by Josephine Henry Whitehouse

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AMBUSH

This melodramatic farce of Shein Feiners and a warfare of wits will be interesting and exhilarating to produce. Mrs. Whitehouse has provided a comedy which moves rapidly and hilariously, with a fascinating Irish lass as the leading character and the asset of a rich brogue for all characters. Her dialect is perfectly indicated and if an actual Irishman could be induced to read the play to the cast once or twice it should have no difficulty in catching the lilt and the major points of the accent. Aunt Delia can indulge in rather broad comedy but Michael must be careful not to allow his masquerade as Mrs. O'Flaherty to become too exaggerated.

PROPERTY LIST

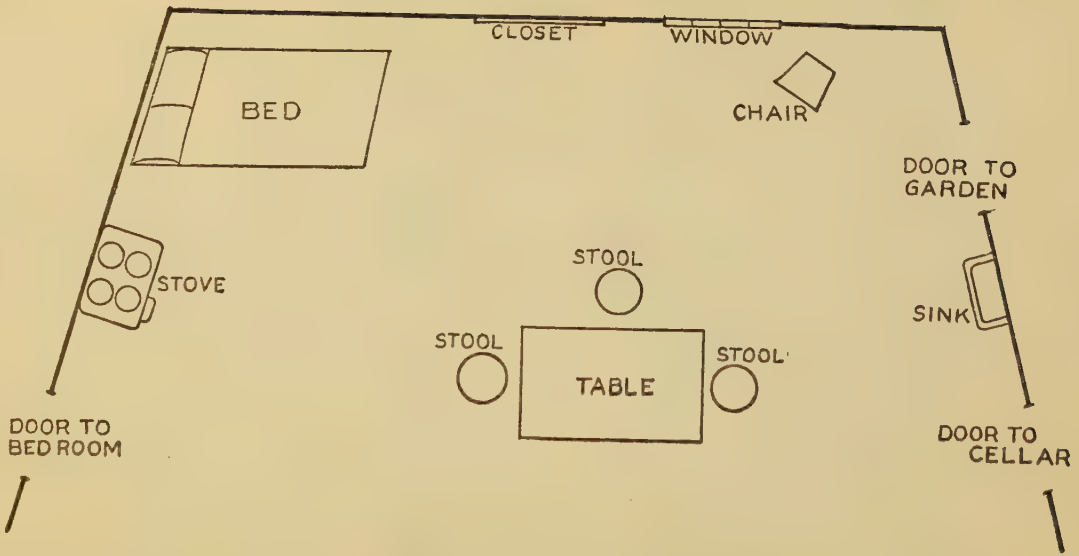
For Kitty
- Black and tan uniform
- Cakes in pan
- Flour sifter and receptacle
- Jug
- Mugs
- Pistol
- Candle

For Michael
- Candle
- Wedding ring
- Potatoes

For Aunt Delia
- Apron
- Spectacles
- Kerchief
- Dress
- Cap with false hair sewn
- Nightgown

For the Sergeant
- Mugs
- Jug

For Father Shawn
- Holy vessels



STAGE PLAN FOR "AMBUSH"

AMBUSH

CHARACTERS

KITTY MALONE
MICHAEL O'DOWD
AUNT DELIA
SERGEANT, SOLDIER, BOY } *Black and Tans*

MALONE'S *kitchen, Kilgore, on a June morning. Triangular set with closet BC (door of which is open at rise); door into garden RC; door into bedroom L front; stove LC, pump and sink R front, also cellar door extreme R front; window RB. There is a table C and a four-post bed with varicolored counterpane against wall L. On a chair back is a folded uniform of Black and Tan. At rise* KITTY *is cheerily singing "My love is like a red, red rose," then she changes off to "Kathleen Mavourneen," while she is busily putting cakes into oven. She returns to table and puts her flour sifter and receptacle in a flour barrel in store closet BC. She takes uniform off from chair, creases it carefully, refolds and returns it to chair. When finished* KITTY *approaches outer door which is open.* AUNT DELIA *enters from bedroom.*

AUNT DELIA

Dear sakes! Kitty, if this isn't your namesake day and you promised to that spalpeen, Micky O'Dowd. Shure, I might ha' minded it wid the cheery singing o' ye. (AUNT DELIA *looks at the uniform and shivers.*) Begorra! what ye're after havin' on yon chair?

KITTY
It's never knowing you are when a uniform'll come in handy.

AUNT DELIA
Kitty, you aren't after getting it from the corp layin' in the meadow yon?

KITTY (*merrily*)
And where would I be getting it, Aunt Delia, but from yon Black and Tan was potted?

AUNT DELIA
Faith, and before the corp was cold belike!

KITTY
Ay! I wouldn't wonder!

AUNT DELIA
It's a creepy feelin' I'm after having in the spine o' me wid Black and Tans jumping out o' every bush like Jack in the Box. (*Pause.*) It's a hard time I had wid me dressing for fear o' Peeping Toms!

KITTY (*merrily*)
You leave the lads be and they'll be doing the like o' you, I'm thinking—

AUNT DELIA
Shure, and it's no laughing matter, Kitty. You should be after moving to County Kerry. It's grand and foine, Kitty. They don't be having such goings on. It's as dacent a county as you'd like to find—

KITTY (*merrily*)
But the wakes is sparse I'm thinking—

AUNT DELIA
Shure and I was never one to be haunting wakes. 'Tis

plentiful they are in County Kildaire—I daren't put me nose out the winder for fearin' it's me'll be the next corp to be laid out— (DELIA *starts towards bedroom.*) It's me finery I'll be donning for the wedding straight.

KITTY

And what if there's no wedding the morn?

AUNT DELIA

But, Kitty, darlint, 'twas yourself give me to understand there was to be a marrying in County Kildaire—

KITTY

And what if meself is taking it back?
(DELIA *rushes over to* KITTY, *pats her arm and kisses her.*)

AUNT DELIA

Shure and it's praising the Lord I am for that. It's no way at all for a girl to wed a lad's scurrying like a rabbit before the law—

KITTY

Himself has no harm in him has Micky and as truthful a lad as you'd like to find. It's proud of him I am the day. Sure, it's the law is a back number I'll have you know!

AUNT DELIA

Faith, and it's well we don't all puff up at the like o' that or Ireland be tumbling about our heads! (*Pause.*) And it's all me troubles I get for me pains? I might ha' slept sound in me bed in County Kerry!
(*The window BB is open with short curtain.* BOY *puts his head through window.*)

BOY

Whist! Ambush! A wake is called a quarter hour forbye!
(*The* BOY'S *head is instantly withdrawn.* AUNT DELIA *crosses herself.*)

AUNT DELIA
So help me God! Kitty, 'tis in fear I am of me life—

KITTY
Yon is a Shein Feiner! Keep heart in you, Aunt Delia, for you'll be needing it before the sun sets I'm thinking. (KITTY *starts to take off her aunt's apron, kerchief, etc., in a hasty manner.*)

AUNT DELIA
Don't be so free wid me person, Kitty.

KITTY
It's the clothes o' ye I'm wanting—

AUNT DELIA
Shure, you can have the pick in me box inside—Sunday gownd and all. . . .

KITTY
It's the clothes on your back I'm wanting—
(AUNT DELIA *jerks herself away from* KITTY.)

AUNT DELIA (*with asperity*)
Faith, and you can go on wanting for all o' me.
(KITTY *tackles her again.*)

KITTY
It's only the loan o' them I'm asking—me that's your own brother's lass—

AUNT DELIA
Faith, I wasn't knowing when I was well off in County Kerry—

KITTY
But in County Kerry I'm minded you were lonely as the day is long. It's in County Kildaire you're stopping if I know the heart of ye—

AUNT DELIA (*unbending*)
Shure, and you could be wheedling everything offen me back, Kitty. Not me eye teeth I'll wager, seeing I've not a one left in me head.

KITTY
Quick! It's ten by the clock. I want you should be hiding in the feather bed till noon—

AUNT DELIA
It's the spitting image of your da you are. He was the grand one for ordering you all over the place, was Pat—

KITTY (*wheedlingly*)
Get into your nightgown, Makushla!

AUNT DELIA
Begorra! is it me shift you're maning?

KITTY
It's quick you are wid the wits o' ye—

AUNT DELIA
Quicker nor wid me dressing but faith not quick enough for the like o' you—
(KITTY *points like a martinet to bedroom.*)

KITTY
Into yon room and take off your dress—

AUNT DELIA
Faith and ye missed your calling, Kitty. It's a soldier ye should oughter be.

KITTY (*mischievously*)
Shure, it's a soldier's wife is in the making!

AUNT DELIA
Is that all you're wanting o' the likes o' me?

KITTY
It's life or death!

AUNT DELIA
You're after knowing the soft heart o' me, Kitty, darlint. I wouldn't harm a rabbit.
(KITTY *half pushes her into bedroom.*)

KITTY
Quick—your spectacles, kerchief, the cap with the transformation and false front sewed in—
(AUNT DELIA *stands reluctant on threshold.*)

AUNT DELIA
So help me God! it's bald as a vulture I am by the grace of God!

KITTY
The morn you'll be as God made you—

AUNT DELIA
Faith and it's a pert party you are, Miss Kitty Malone. Is it me false teeth you're after wanting?

KITTY
You can keep them for all o' me—

AUNT DELIA
It's blind as a bat I am widout me specs—

KITTY
Then once you're in bed you'll be after stopping—

AUNT DELIA
It's not worriting meself sick I am to get under a feather bed the day and it so hot—

KITTY
Be off with you, Aunt Delia, 'cepting you want to be chief mourner at a wake—

AUNT DELIA

And it's your da's own sister you're ordering round like childer— It's praising the Lord I'll be when I'm safe home in County Kerry—

(DELIA *crosses herself and exits into bedroom.* KITTY *takes the uniform and tucks it under the mattress. There is a prolonged cuckoo call offstage, then same repeated three times.* KITTY *stands alert, goes to threshold of door which is ajar and calls "cuckoo" thrice. A moment later* MICHAEL *appears. He is well set up, youthful and winning in his manner. He takes* KITTY *in his arms and embraces her.*)

MICHAEL

Mavourneen! Is it ready you are to wed the day?

(KITTY *withdraws from his arms.*)

KITTY

Micky! The Black and Tans are on your trail. A warning came two minutes ago by the clock—

MICHAEL

Was it a carrot head gave the password?

KITTY

Ay! Ten minutes, Micky. You're to be Mrs. O'Flaherty a neighbor woman who acts as midwife—Aunt Delia's clothes—

MICHAEL

'Tis a brave woman you are, Kitty—fit wife for the head o' the Free State!

(KITTY *runs over to stove to look at cake.*)

KITTY

I must look to me cakes. It's feeding the Black and Tans high I am the day—

MICHAEL

Shure, Kitty, it's the two of us will best them, never fear.

KITTY
Leave all to me.
(*She stands listening.*)
Hark! Into the closet, Micky.
(*She pushes him in BC.* SERGEANT *enters RC.*)

SERGEANT
I got a search warrant on me.

KITTY
The top o' the morning to ye!

SERGEANT
The house is surrounded with King's men!
(KITTY *bends her knee.*)

KITTY
Shure, and it's glad I am to be helping King's men! (*Pause.*) Quare and odd but it's by way o' being thirsty weather! Will your lads be liking somewhat to drink?

SERGEANT
Right-o! You're a little bit o' all right, my girl.
(KITTY *hands him a jug.*)

KITTY
You'll find a keg o' porter down cellar. (*Pause.*) Shure, it's meself would be drawin it for you only me cakes would be after burning to a crisp—
(*She gives him a winning smile.* SERGEANT *hesitates a moment then starts towards cellar door, which* KITTY *has opened.*)

SERGEANT
The cellar's as good a place to start the search, lassie!
(SERGEANT *exits and* KITTY *closes door. Black and Tan soldier looks in door RC.*)

SOLDIER
Are you needing any more blighters, Sergeant?

KITTY
'Tis down cellar he is. Faith, my cake is burning on me.
(KITTY *rushes to oven and draws out pans.*)

SOLDIER
From the look of things you ain't no blooming, bloody customer!
(KITTY *bows to him mischievously.*)

AUNT DELIA (*offstage*)
Kitty, is it company you got? (DELIA *pokes her head through door L.*) Here's me clothes you're after wanting.

KITTY (*sternly*)
Into your bed this minute or I'll not be answering for the life of you.
(KITTY *is about to take clothes but* SOLDIER *is before her.*)

SOLDIER
And what's doing with the blinking duds?

KITTY
It's into the tub they're going.

SOLDIER
Cripes! not specs, hair and all?

KITTY
Whist! man, have a care. 'Tis somewhat catching she has I'm thinking.
(SOLDIER *drops them on the floor.*)

SOLDIER
For cripes' sake!

KITTY
You'll be drinking a drop o' porter, lad?

SOLDIER
A jugful to wet my whistle! Lead me to it.

(KITTY *opens cellar door and hands him another pitcher.* SOLDIER *exits. She takes clothes to closet and passes them in to* MICHAEL.)

KITTY (*whispering*)
Micky—quick—before he's up from the cellar.
(KITTY *closes storeroom door. Bedroom door opens and* KITTY *drags* AUNT DELIA *in nightgown to bed.*)

AUNT DELIA
Begorra! if it's smothering I am me death be on your conscience, Kitty.

KITTY
Into the bed, quick. Moan so loud as you can. It's smallpox you're having.

AUNT DELIA
O Mother of God! (KITTY *puts her under the feather bed.*) Faith, it's near smothered I am. (DELIA *sticks her head up.*) Kitty, it's not putting up wid no more foolishness I am. It's me duds I'm getting and I'm heading straight for County Kerry.

KITTY
Ssh! (KITTY *reaches under the mattress and brings forth a pistol. She holds it over her aunt.*) Under the covers and not a sound out o' you. 'Tis your life or Micky's!

AUNT DELIA (*in muffled voice*)
So help me God! It's into bed I'm going and it's dead I'll be, smallpox or no.
(KITTY *covers her up to chin with coverlid. The cellar door opens and* SERGEANT *appears.*)

KITTY
You're after finding the porter?

SERGEANT
Right-o. I drew a jugful.

(*He holds up his jug. Black and Tan sticks his head in window.*)

BLACK AND TAN
It's thirsty I am as a fish!
(KITTY *hands out porter and mugs through window.*)

KITTY
Lads, you'll be having your fill. And if it's cakes you're after wanting—

VOICES
I say!
Blyme me!
My word!
(KITTY *hands them a plate of cakes.*)

KITTY
See that you're emptying the dish. KITTY *turns and bows to* SERGEANT.) Kitty Malone at your service!

SERGEANT
Watch all the exits, buddies!
(*He calls out of window.* KITTY *runs prettily towards bedroom and opens door for* SERGEANT *then closes it after him. She waits a moment to listen at cellar door.*)

KITTY (*whispering*)
Micky! (MICHAEL *appears in* DELIA'S *togs.*) Shure, and it's not so bad a midwife you're making.
(*She turns him round in front of her.*)

MICHAEL
Where? (KITTY *nods her head towards bedroom and cellar.*) Kitty, Mavourneen, it's wed we'll be in spite of them.
(*Steps are heard at cellar door.*)

KITTY
Whist! (MICHAEL *turns to storeroom.*) Mrs. O'Flah-

erty, it's a few spuds you can be picking for dinner in yon closet. (SOLDIER *opens cellar door just in time to hear last.* MICHAEL *is hid behind door of closet.*) Will you be giving the porter to the lads. Here's some mugs. (KITTY *hands him latter.* SOLDIER *exits with porter and mugs on tray.*) Faith, and it's little you can be doing for the like o' her, Mrs. O'Flaherty, and you no more than a midwife. (SERGEANT *enters from bedroom.* KITTY *goes to bed and stands over invalid, takes her hand.*) Mother of God! her heart's near gone, poor soul. Shure, she's not living the night through I'm thinking. (*She turns to* SERGEANT.) Faith, it's a favor I'm asking. It's the priest at the crossroads, Father Shawn, I'm wanting. It's a mort o' doctoring he's knowing and shure it's the last rites she'll be needing or my name's not Kitty Malone.

SERGEANT

I say! That's bad. One o' my buddies can jolly well step over to the crossroads.

KITTY

Shure and it's beholden to you I am the day. (KITTY *smiles at him and he exits R.* KITTY *closes door.*) Micky, it's married we'll be the day.

MICHAEL (*comes out of closet*)

It's a head on your shoulders you're having, Mavourneen.

KITTY

It's all me wits I'm needing if you're to get from under their noses. Go to your spuds, Micky, for it's in fear of your life I am.

(MICHAEL *goes into closet and* DELIA *puts her head out.*)

AUNT DELIA

Faith, Kitty, it's near dead I am.

(KITTY *covers her up to the chin.*)

KITTY
Of a smallpox, Aunt Delia. If you don't play the part 'tis certain sure there'll be a wake for three.

AUNT DELIA
It's my flowered silk I'm putting on.

KITTY (*interrupting*)
It's your shift you'll be wearing or nothing.
(AUNT DELIA *moans.* SERGEANT *enters from outside.*)

SERGEANT
No more people in the house besides you and the old woman?

KITTY
Mrs. O'Flaherty, is it sleeping you are over the spuds? Here's a young gintleman is itching to know ye. (MICHAEL *emerges from storeroom with potatoes in an apron.*) Haven't you a dacent tongue in your head? (KITTY *turns to* SERGEANT.) Shure, it's bashful she is. Give her time, lad. (SERGEANT *sights* MICKY'S *shoes.*) Shure, now she's finding her tongue, I'm thinking.

MICHAEL
Ouch! my big best toe.
(*He hops on one toe.*)

KITTY
Dear sakes! and shure I thought da's old brogues was safe hid from the bat's eyes o' ye.

MICHAEL
Tight brogues is no better nor tight stays!

KITTY
'Tis a whole crop o' corns you'll be growing with brogues the size of a house! Mrs. O'Flaherty, take my advice, go be getting into your own boots.

(A *prolonged cuckoo note is heard offstage.* MICHAEL *exits into bedroom.*)

SERGEANT
Isn't it late for them cuckoo birds?

KITTY (*merrily*)
Shure, my man, it's June, the mating season. 'Tis hearing them in July I am in County Kildaire.

SERGEANT
A buddy's gone for the priest.
(KITTY *bows.*)
Miss Malone, is it truth you're going to be married?

KITTY (*saucily*)
Faith and that's a chancy question to ask a lady's by way of being modest. Shure, it's hoping I am to wed some day if Irishmen stop fighting before every last one o' them is potted!
(KITTY *laughs merrily.* FATHER SHAWN *enters with* SOLDIER.)

FATHER SHAWN
Good day to you, daughter. So it's the last rites—

KITTY (*interrupting*)
'Tis in the nick o' time you are, Father. (KITTY *advances to bed.*) 'Tis a vomiting she had yester even and now a coma—

FATHER SHAWN
May her soul rest in peace.
(*He crosses himself.*)

KITTY
Her time on earth is short, Father Shawn; we'll be getting ready in yon room for the sacrament.
(KITTY *leads way into chamber,* FATHER SHAWN *follow-*

ing. The door is closed. SERGEANT *stands a moment over the bed looking at* AUNT DELIA *then opens outer door.*)

SERGEANT (*calling*)
Buddies, do you think that the hare's escaped?
(SOLDIER *comes to threshold.*)

SOLDIER
Blyme me! you said it!

SERGEANT
Two women and an old priest—one old woman near ready for the wake—

VOICE (*offstage*)
The young un's a pippin!

SERGEANT
All drunk to the taps, buddies?

VOICES
Right-o!
(SOLDIER *enters with mugs and pitcher. Presently the chamber door opens.* FATHER SHAWN *in cassock emerges with holy vessels,* MICHAEL *and* KITTY *follow each with a lighted candle.* KITTY *sets stools either side the bed.* FATHER SHAWN *crosses himself and begins intoning last rites.*)

KITTY (*suddenly*)
Father Shawn, do you be knowing the look o' smallpox? It's fearful I am of them spots on top o' the vomiting. (KITTY *keeps her distance from bed. Black and Tans exit hastily, and close door;* KITTY *and* MICHAEL *kneel.*) I, Kitty, take thee, Michael, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health till death us do part.

MICHAEL
With this ring, I thee wed— (*He slips ring on her finger.*)
And with all my earthly goods I thee endow.

FATHER SHAWN
I pronounce you man and wife. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen!
(*Priest holds his hands over their heads a moment.* MICHAEL *embraces* KITTY.)

MICHAEL
Kitty, Mavourneen—
(KITTY *procures uniform from under mattress and hands it to* MICHAEL.)

KITTY
Right smart—no lingering. Be laying the clothes in the dresser. (MICHAEL *takes uniform and makes for bedroom.*) In two minutes I'll be after calling in the Black and Tans.
(MICHAEL *exits.*)

FATHER SHAWN
Kitty Malone, it's glad I am to be knowing ye. It's the equal of ten men ye are in wits alone.

KITTY (*merrily*)
Shure, 'tis right and proper you be kissing the bride, Father, she's Kitty O'Dowd now I'll have you know.
(FATHER SHAWN *kisses* KITTY.)

AUNT DELIA
Can I be getting out, Kitty? A nice way to be coming to a marrying in me shift.

KITTY
Shure, it's better nor a shroud!

AUNT DELIA
Is the soldiers after going?

KITTY

Whist! Not a word out o' ye. . . . (KITTY *covers* AUNT DELIA *again. She goes to outer door and opens it.*) Come in, boys. 'Tis nothing to be fearing. Father Shawn is saying it's no smallpox that's blotching her—the Lord be praised! (KITTY *crosses herself.* SERGEANT *and* SOLDIER *enters, others stand outside.*) And will ye be drinking to me health and that of the poor soul layin' at death's door.

(SERGEANT *sights* KITTY'S *ring.*)

SERGEANT

Hold! It's a wedding ring what's on your finger—

(*A prolonged cuckoo note heard offstage.*)

KITTY (*merrily*)

I wouldn't be surprised, my lads. Michael O'Dowd is as good as his word.

SERGEANT

Holy Moses! it's a ruse—she was married already—

(*Kitty makes a curtsey.*)

KITTY

'Tis the morn I was wed, my lads— Will you be drinking to me health in fresh foaming porter?

(*A prolonged cuckoo note heard offstage.*)

SOLDIER

Cripes! the woods is full of them cuckoo birds!

KITTY

Faith, man, are you forgetting it's June, the mating season!

CURTAIN

THE MELANCHOLY DAME

A Dark Comedy

by Octavus Roy Cohen

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THE MELANCHOLY DAME

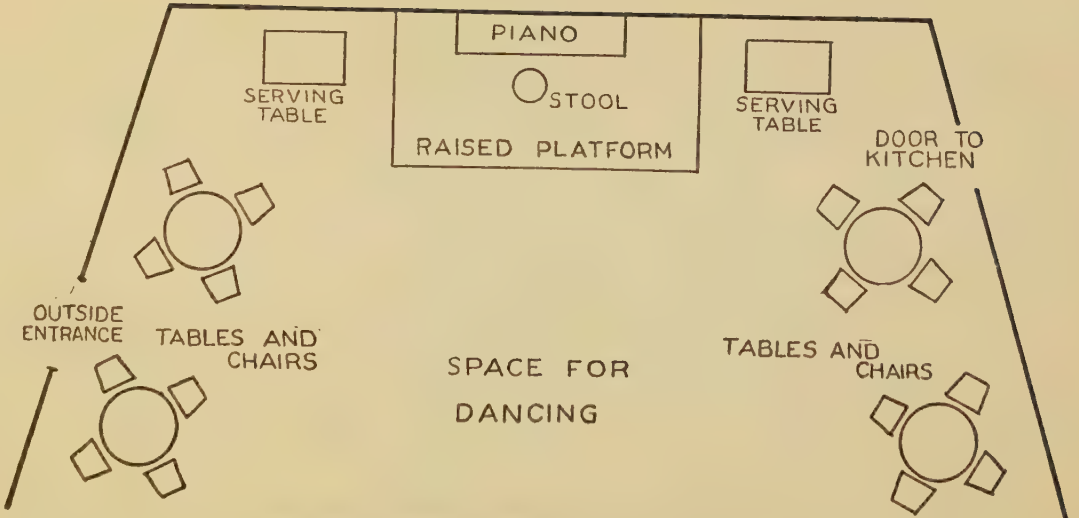
Octavus Roy Cohen's characters lose none of their delicious humor in transference from the short story to the stage. Any Little Theatre group will find this play extraordinarily refreshing. The director who is looking for something "different" will find that the versatility of his players can be shown to no better advantage than in these characters of ladies and gentlemen of color against the exciting background of a cabaret. It affords an opportunity for the legitimate introduction of jazz music, and Black Bottom dances.

The setting is the simplest imaginable. An upright piano, a few tables and chairs, some crêpe paper "festoons" are all that is necessary. The actors will find that Mr. Cohen has written the speeches so well that no one can fail to catch the negro rhythm they contain. His phonetic spelling of some of the words will help, too, in acquiring the dialect. In making up for the parts a specially prepared powder, Buch's water color powder for negro make-up, made by Buch's Theatrical Make-up Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, may be employed. This is mixed with water and applied, giving a smoother and more agreeable make-up than grease. It can be made as light or as dark as desired.

PROPERTY LIST

For the Waiter

Glasses	Drinks
Serving trays	Check pads
Sandwiches	Pencils



STAGE PLAN FOR "THE MELANCHOLY DAME"

THE MELANCHOLY DAME

CHARACTERS

MR. WEBSTER DILL, *a Gargantuan piano player*
MRS. SAPHO DILL, *his wife, young, attractive octoroon and most excellent dancer*
MR. PERMANENT WILLIAMS, *the sad proprietor of the dance hall*
JONQUIL WILLIAMS, *his wife, jealous and determined*
TWO OR MORE EXTRA COUPLES
WAITER

SCENE: *A cheap cabaret, exits R and L, not more than twelve or fifteen feet deep. Up center an upright piano against the wall. If possible, piano and stool are on a platform about eight inches high. There are four small tables, two on each side, leaving center open for dancing. Tables and chairs of cheapest kind; on them glasses, ash trays and bottles of evil-looking whisky and gin. In the upper corners are small serving tables. Door R entrance for guest, door L for proprietor and waiter.*

MR. WEBSTER DILL *wears largest dress suit in captivity and sufficient padding and large collar give an appearance of great size and strength.* MRS. DILL *has bobbed black hair, greatly improved by anti-kink and while* MR. DILL *is quite dark, she is very light. She wears a filmy white dress, with thin straps over shoulders, close-fitting, absolutely simple, about two inches below knees, and while cut high*

in front the back is extremely low. Wears bracelets, white silk stockings and white shoes.

MR. WILLIAMS *wears a white silk shirt, scarlet bow-tie, white flannel trousers and white shoes, white socks, but a very decorative ribbon belt.*

MRS. WILLIAMS, *spangled dress, low neck, long white gloves and a long, ornamented necklace, dangling earrings, scarf. Her hair is kinky and not bobbed.*

TIME: *The present.*

AT RISE: MR. DILL *is at piano, playing animated jazz.* MRS. DILL *is dancing with a gentleman, two other couples dancing. At first table down L are seated* MR. *and* MRS. WILLIAMS; *on table are sandwiches and drinks. She is up stage and he is to L of table.* WAITER *enters L, balancing tray above his head, and with skill works his way between dancing couples, puts it on dresser R, transferring glasses and sandwiches to table up R. Dance meanwhile drawing to a close. One couple sits at table up L, another joins table up L, while* SAPHO *proceeds to dance alone, clog or Charleston or rhythmic dance, as best suits mood. The dance is short but effective, and in response to the applause of every one, save* JONQUIL *and* PERMANENT, *it is repeated as quietly as possible. The music is barely audible.*

JONQUIL

Permanent! Ev'y time I looks at that fool woman dancin' I thinks how good she would look with a lily in her han'.

PERMANENT

Honey! You ain't got no right thinkin' them kind of thoughts.

JONQUIL

Mm! Mebbe not (*Sadly.*) but as I has warned you—

does you not fire her out of her job they's gwine be a quick call fo' the undertaker.

PERMANENT
You ain't meanin' . . .

JONQUIL
I means I has stood all what I prospec's to stan', an' you or her, one, is pretty close to a heap of ginuwine trouble.

PERMANENT
From de day dis restrant was converted into a cabaret with Webster there at the piano and Sapho as entertainer and vaudeville star, this jazzadancerie has become a gold mine.

JONQUIL
If you doesn't fire de bofe of dem and fire 'em now, your gold mine's gwine to look like a gold brick.

PERMANENT
But, Jonquil—where we goin' to get any one to play de piano as good as Webster?

JONQUIL
I has small use for dat elephant. Ain't he allowed dis flirtation to go on under his very nose?

PERMANENT
Can't I convince you, honey, dat dare ain't no flirtation between Sapho and me?

JONQUIL
You got about as much chance of convincin' me dat your dancin' together ain't flirtatious as a one-eyed pig has got at a barbecue.
(When SAPHO'S *dance is finished* [*applause*], *she goes to piano and joins her husband in conversation.)*

PERMANENT
My dancin' with her is purely a matter of business.

JONQUIL
T'ain't pure and it's funny business.
(*The crowd starts yelling: "'Nother Dance"; "Give us another"; "Dance one with* PERMANENT WILLIAMS," *etc. This last cry is repeated and all eyes focused on* PERMANENT. *He rises, looks at* JONQUIL, *wavers.*)

PERMANENT
You ain't sore, is you, Jonquil?

JONQUIL
I'se so sore dat was I all over ointment I'd still ache.
(PERMANENT *and* SAPHO *dance unique and athletic dance, accompanied by* WEBSTER. *On the last note of the dance he deposits her sitting on table R. He stands beside her, back to center, they acknowledge applause with bows upstage.* PERMANENT *turns to* SAPHO.)

PERMANENT
The day you come to Bummin'ham, Sapho, was the most unlucky day of my life.

SAPHO
Huh! You says words, but they ain't got no sense to 'em, Permanent. When me an' Webster come heah you wasn't no farther than one inch away fum bankrup'cy. An' now where is you at?
(PERMANENT *eyes affectionately the happy, money-spending multitude in the jazzadancerie.*)

PERMANENT
I's admittin' that you an' Webster boosted business an' all that— (*He glimpses the menacing figure of his wife.*) but, Sapho, you have done tooken away all the happiness of bein' a ma'ied man.

SAPHO (*she followed the direction of his gaze*)
Jonquil?

PERMANENT
Uh-huh.

SAPHO
She's jealous of I an' you?

PERMANENT
All two bofe of us.

SAPHO
Why'n't you tell her she ain't got no cause to be jealous?

PERMANENT
Huh! Lot of good that'd do.

SAPHO
Sho'ly it would. If she was to know that I an' you useter be ma'ied an' that we got a divo'ce fum each other . . .

PERMANENT
Was she to know that, Sapho, I an' you would atten' a concert which we woul'n't hear none of, an' all the music would be sof' an' low.

SAPHO
Even if she understood that we gotten our divo'ce on account you useter raise so much hell 'roun' the house?

PERMANENT
Jonquil never would un'erstan' that.

SAPHO
How come not?

PERMANENT
On account all the hell which is raised 'roun' our house

she raises. An' was I to tell her I useter to be boss she'd know it was a lie an' a frame-up.
(SAPHO *stares curiously across the room at the sad* JONQUIL.)

SAPHO
You is bigger'n her, Permanent.

PERMANENT
'Tain't her size, it's the length of her tongue. My Gawd, Sapho, Jonquil is the talkin'est woman you ever did see.

SAPHO
Talk never hurt nobody.

PERMANENT
Mebbe not. But it's made 'em mighty sick.
(SAPHO'S *palm smacks on the table top.*)

SAPHO
If she on'y knowed it, Permanent, they is jes one pusson in the whole world she ain't got no cause to git jealous of, an' her is me.

PERMANENT
That's what you know an' I know, Sapho. But if we is in a fix.

SAPHO
You is (*She answers firmly.*); I ain't.

PERMANENT (*leaning forward earnestly*)
C'mon now. Be a good spoht an' leave Bummin'ham.

SAPHO
You is mos' as foolish as you looks.

PERMANENT (*desperately*)
You got to.

SAPHO
Well— (*Her tone is deadly level.*) I tells you heah an' now I ain't got no idea of same. What is you gwine do 'bout it?

PERMANENT
But, Sapho . . .

SAPHO
Don't you go buttin' me. Webster an' I come heah when you was jes' 'bout to lose ev'y las' nickel which you owned an' we siggested you should make a cabaret outen yo' rest'rant. An' what happened? Right away you sta'ted makin' money—heaps of money. You is mos' gittin' to be a rich man. All the money you is got . . .

PERMANENT
Money ain't no good after you is daid.

SAPHO
You gittin' daid don't intrust me none. I an' Webster made this heah business what it is, an' we ain't gwine lef' it now.

PERMANENT (*his jaw hardens*)
S'posin' I fires you bofe?

SAPHO (*laughs; a hard, threatening little laugh*)
You won't.

PERMANENT
How come not?

SAPHO
You ain't got the nerve. You ain't even most got the nerve.

PERMANENT
On account . . .

SAPHO (*nodding toward her mammoth husband*)
On account Webster hates you.

PERMANENT
He ain't never acted like it.

SAPHO
Tha's 'cause he don't know you is the man he hates.

PERMANENT (*staring at her curiously*)
Meanin' which?

SAPHO
Meanin' this: Befo' I ma'ied Webster he ast all about the feller I had be'n ma'ied to an' got divo'ced away fum. I ain't never tol' him yo' name, but I has tol' him a heap else.

PERMANENT
Did you tell him we met at the dance given under de auspices of de Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise?

SAPHO
Fat chance!

PERMANENT
Did ye tell him of our twenty weeks in Vaudeville?

SAPHO
Ebony Circuit?

PERMANENT
Big Time Acts only.

SAPHO
I told him as much about dat as you told Jonquil.

PERMANENT
But I ain't never told Jonquil.

SAPHO

An' lucky fo' you, fella, I ain't never told my massive mate.

PERMANENT (*joyfully*)

You ain't?

SAPHO

An' I ain't tol' him the troof, neither. I wasn't gwine tell him you useter bully me, on account I made my min' up that was I ma'ied to him I was gwine do all the bullyin'. So I tol' him that my fust husban' useter beat me up all the time. I tol' him he was the croolest man which ever was ma'ied to a woman. If you had of ever done half the things to me which he thinks my fust husban' done, they woul'n't be enough left of me to stick a postage stamp on. The p'int bein' that Webster is plumb crazy 'bout me an' he has always said that does he ever meet up with my fust husban' he's gwine beat him up so bad the insurance company ain't gwine 'low his fambly's claim on account the body can't be identified. (PERMANENT *goes cold all over. He steals an apprehensive glance at* WEBSTER. *She rightly interprets his look.*) Yep! Jes squash yo'!

PERMANENT

Y-y-y-you ain't se'ious?

SAPHO

Ain't I, though! Does you think I ain't, you fire me away fum this job an' lemme tell him you was my fust husban' —jes' do that, Permanent, an' right away you is gwine be ain't!

PERMANENT

Jes' like you, Sapho—go lyin' 'bout me that away an' get me all kilt up.

SAPHO

That's sure your horoscope when Webster gleans dat you formally halved ma joys and doubled ma sorrow.

PERMANENT
You mean, Sapho, that you is the boss in yo' family?

SAPHO
I is. (*She returns proudly.*) It's all how ma'ied folks sta'ts off. When I an' you was ma'ied you sta'ted off the boss. But when I made ma'iage with Webster I di'n't lose no time lettin' him know I was gwine have my own way.
(*The music starts promptly: "Yes sir, that's my Baby." The gentleman who formerly danced with* SAPHO *leaves table left and asks girl to dance at table up R. The gentleman at table up R dances with* SAPHO. *The remaining couple, table up L, have instantly started and do a Charleston more or less as an individual act. During the previous dialogue,* JONQUIL *has been nursing the happy idea that* SAPHO *is being fired and looks forward to* PERMANENT *bringing her the happy news, but during the dance* PERMANENT *busies himself stage R with waiter. As dance finishes, couples resume their tables.* SAPHO *at table down R with her partner.* JONQUIL *calls across to* PERMANENT, *who is down R.*)

JONQUIL
Permanent?

PERMANENT
Yeh, honey?

JONQUIL
Did you discharge Sapho fum wukkin' fo' us?

PERMANENT (*he attempts evasion*)
I ain't said I ain't.

JONQUIL
You ain't said you is.

PERMANENT
I ain't said nothin'.

JONQUIL
I asts you then fo' the las' an' finalist time? Is you or is you ain't?

PERMANENT (*he scratches his head*)
I—I ain't! (*Then his voice mounts to a moan of protest.*) Honeybunch, I cain't!

JONQUIL
Tha's what you says.

PERMANENT
It's the hones'-t'-Gawd troof.

JONQUIL
A'right. Also it's the hones'-t'-Gawd troof that I an' you is finished, done an' completed with one another.

PERMANENT
Honey—

JONQUIL
You go find another hive.

PERMANENT
Sapho done made the Jazzadancerie siccessful.

JONQUIL
She made a heap mo'n that. She made me mad.

PERMANENT
You ain't gwine b'lieve . . .

JONQUIL
I b'lieves what I b'lieves. An' I tells you right heah an' now that does you not git rid of that woman, I gits rid of her my own se'f. (*Stony silence.*) Permanent, I gives you one last chance: Does you fire Sapho?

PERMANENT (*raises haggard eyes*)
I cain't.

JONQUIL
A'right.

PERMANENT
Is you prospectin' to do somethin'?

JONQUIL
Yeh.

PERMANENT
But, sweetness . . .

JONQUIL
Thanks fo' them sandwiches, Mistuh Williams. (*Eating majestically.*) I has got to eat with you, but I ain't cravin' to make no talk.

PERMANENT
Anyway, you ain't gwine to make sech a hell of a good-lookin' widder.
(*Exits.*)

(*During the above dialogue the waiter unostentatiously presents checks and is paid by guests and when he will not interrupt the action he converses with the pianist or exits L and reënters.* JONQUIL *taps on glass with her knife imperiously;* WAITER *approaches; she snatches the check-pad he has in his hand.*)

JONQUIL
Do you expect me to write with my thumb?
(*He quickly produces pencil. She writes rather laboriously. During this pantomime* WEBSTER *plays luxurious waltz.* JONQUIL *hands the* WAITER *her note, having slapped pad and pencil down on table.* WAITER *carries note to* SAPHO, *who reads it and rises indignantly. She walks truculently over to* JONQUIL'S *table, still holding the note. They face each other.* SAPHO *reads note aloud:*

SAPHO
"Mrs. Dill,
"Dear Madam:
"Your presents is requested immediate on a matter of atmost importance and you better come if you know what is good for yours trully.
"Jonquil Williams."

(*Speaks facing* JONQUIL.)
What you mean, 'sultin' me like you done, Mis' Williams?

JONQUIL (*uncompromisingly*)
I meant a heap.

SAPHO
Splain yo'se'f then—an' splain tho'ough.

JONQUIL
Tha's what I intends doin'. (*She leans forward, her long fingers drumming a light tattoo on the table-top.*) Mis' Dill, I has come to info'm you that you an' yo' long, tall husban' is hereby entirely fired!

SAPHO
Says which?

JONQUIL
Says you is bofe fired—discha'ged—kicked out.

SAPHO (*laughs grimly*)
Never knowed so much words could make sech a lil bit of sense.

JONQUIL
Git out.

SAPHO
Who says so?

JONQUIL
I does.

SAPHO
Who you is?

JONQUIL
I runs this place . . .

SAPHO
You does—not. Yo' husban' owns it.

JONQUIL
He says you should git out.

SAPHO (*eyes narrow*)
He never said no sech of a thing.

JONQUIL
He's gwine to.

SAPHO
He ain't.

JONQUIL
I reckon I know my own husban'.

SAPHO
Reckon you don't know him no better'n I. N'r neither even half as good.

JONQUIL
What you mean, cullud woman?

SAPHO
I mean this!
(*Merciless.*)
I mean, did Permanent ever tell you he'd done be'n ma'ied once befo' he met up with you?

JONQUIL
Yeh.

SAPHO

Well . . . (*triumphantly*)—I reckon he never tol' you that I was the woman he was ma'ied to, did he?

JONQUIL (*gasps*)

You?

SAPHO

Uh-huh. Me! An' so—(*Her tone grows a thought more soft.*)—you see they ain't no cause of you bein' jealous of me on account I has had all of Permanent I wants. I has finished an' done with him an' you is welcome to what is lef'. You' jealousy is all wrong, me being his former wife—they ain't nothin' you c'n tell me 'bout our husban' which I don't know a' ready. I bids you good evenin', Mis' Williams.

(SAPHO *makes a triumphant exit R, leaving* JONQUIL *crushed.* WEBSTER *starts a waltz song.* JONQUIL *thinks hard, gets an idea, slaps the table with the palm of her hand, goes resolutely to* WEBSTER *and talks earnestly to him. What she says is not heard by the audience, but he stops with a discord in the middle of the music and listens attentively. Guests rise, exit R, laughing and talking.* WAITER *exits L. After they have gone, she concludes with*

JONQUIL (*aloud*)

I thought you ought to know.)

(*She leaves him and goes back to her seat at table down L. He turns to piano and plays: "Nobody knows the trouble I'm in, Nobody knows but Jesus."* PERMANENT *enters L and shuffles over to* JONQUIL, *who gives no sign of recognition. Note: The music is continued.*)

PERMANENT

Honey?

JONQUIL (*arching her brows*)

It's Permanent, ain't it?

PERMANENT
Uh-huh—(*humbly*)—I'se he. (*Pause.*)

JONQUIL
Yes.

PERMANENT
Alone?

JONQUIL
Not entirely.

PERMANENT
Who you be'n talkin' to?

JONQUIL (*looking him straight in the eyes*)
On'y yo' ex-wife.

PERMANENT
M-m-my which?

JONQUIL
Yo' ex-wife.

PERMANENT
Meanin' . . .

JONQUIL
How many ex-wifes has you got?

PERMANENT (*in a most doleful tone*)
One too much.

JONQUIL
Well, I has be'n talkin' to her.

PERMANENT
Wh-what she said?

JONQUIL
Sapho di'n't say much, Permanent. Not near enough. So I went an' had a lil talk with her husban'.

PERMANENT (*staggering*)
With Webster Dill?

JONQUIL
I so't of gotten the idea he di'n't know befo' that you an' Sapho uster be ma'ied.

PERMANENT
What did he say?

JONQUIL
'Tain't what he said, Permanent—it's how he said it. (*Exits.*)

PERMANENT
Oh, my Gawd!
(PERMANENT *thoroughly realizes the situation and is terrorized. His one object is escape by front door, for which he starts on tiptoe, as far away from piano as possible. When he rounds the table down R he drops on his hands and knees. He reacts to every halt in the music. When he reaches the door, his hand steals up to the handle and he opens it slowly. The piano bangs and for a large man* WEBSTER *moves to the door with surprising agility.*)

WEBSTER (*in deep, rumbling voice*)
Mistuh Williams!
(WEBSTER *has approached the door between two tables and like lightning* PERMANENT *has risen to his feet and gone down around front table towards center, where* WEBSTER *continues after him.*)

PERMANENT
M-M-Mistuh Dill.

WEBSTER
Huh! (*A deep, throaty growl.*) So you was Sapho's fust husban'?

PERMANENT
(*Bobs his head in eager agreement.*)

WEBSTER
I was s'prised to heah it.

PERMANENT
I—I kinder thought you would be, Mistuh Dill.
(*After an interminable pause.*)

WEBSTER
I craves to make talk with you, cullud man.

PERMANENT
Hot dam! Let's us make it a long talk.

WEBSTER
Huh! (*Takes one step forward. His mammoth hands descend with sledgehammer force upon the cringing shoulders of* PERMANENT.) I has always wanted to meet up with Sapho's fust husban'. (*Firm, even voice.*) An' now that I has done so—I asts you a question an' I wants a honest answer. (PERMANENT *tries to speak, but no sound is heard.*) What I want to know is this, Mistuh Williams: What is the best way fo' a feller to go about gittin' a divo'ce fum Sapho?

CURTAIN

A CUP OF TEA

A Farce

by Florence Ryerson

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A CUP OF TEA

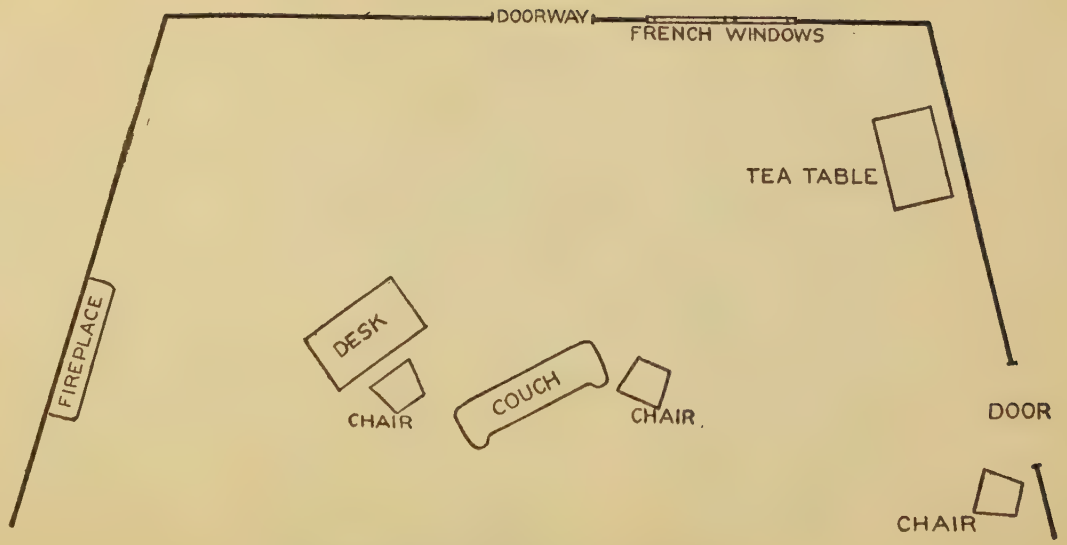
This is just good fooling—a farce, written for the sake of its laughable situation. It cannot be too often repeated, here as elsewhere, that a good farce becomes funny if the players allow the fun to get over to the audience, without thrusting it over the footlights. The players must act in deadly earnest; then only will the points be made.

PROPERTY LIST

For Jane
- Dish towel
- Spoon
- Duster
- Dust pan and brush
- Kettle
- Spirit lamp
- Tea things
- Napkin
- Letter

For Wilfort
- Sheets of paper
- Pen and ink
- Piece of cake

For John
- Revolver



STAGE PLAN FOR "A CUP OF TEA"

A CUP OF TEA

CHARACTERS

WILFORT WENDALL, *a poet*
JANE, *his wife*
AZALEA WARING, *a lady of artistic yearnings*
JOHN, *her husband*

The action takes place in the study of WILFORT WENDALL. *It is a comfortable room furnished in good taste and overflowing with books. At the lower left is the outside door, a telephone beside it. Lower right a fireplace and, fairly close to it, a flat-top desk and chair so placed that one sitting at the desk can look into the fire. There is a hassock beside the desk and, farther left, a couch and chair. At the back a wide doorway with curtains, French windows at the upper left showing a garden without. Upper right a tea table on wheels.*

At rise of curtain Wilfort is struggling with a poem at the desk. He is more or less surrounded with crumpled sheets of paper. His hair and dress are in disorder. He is scribbling on a good deal of paper and smoking as he works.

WILFORT

Gold . . . gold . . . sold. . . . (*He shakes his head.*) Mold? No! Bold? Hold? Might use hold. (*Refers to paper.*) Hold? No go! Rolled . . . rolled. . . .

(*Enter* JANE *through rear doorway. She is a charming comfortable person with a cheerful smile. She is clad in a*

house dress which is at present covered with a white apron. Her sleeves are rolled up and in her hands she carries a dish towel and a large white enamel spoon.)

WILFORT
Gold . . . fold . . . bold. . . . I tried that . . . bold . . . sold . . . oh, damn!
(*He hurls the pen across the room and stalks over to the fireplace.*)

JANE
Why don't you open the windows, Willy? The air is awful! (*She crosses to the French windows and throws them open.*) What's the matter? Having a bad time with your poem?

WILFORT
I'm stuck. Been working all afternoon, too.

JANE
Too bad. Is it that sonnet for whatche-may-call-'ems?

WILFORT (*gloomily*)
Yes. Got to finish it t'night. They want to use it on the title page with one of those color decorations. But I can't seem to get on with it.

JANE
Suppose you put it up and help me can apricots. That'll inspire you.

WILFORT
No. . . . I'll take another crack at the thing.

JANE (*throwing him a kiss off the end of the spoon*)
Good luck!
(*Exit Jane.*)

WILFORT (*very determined*)
Gold . . . rolled . . . bold . . . told . . . that'll do!

Told! (*He bends over the paper. The phone rings, he ignores it. It rings again. He throws down his pen with a muffled "damn!" and crosses the room.*) Hello! Hello! Oh . . . Azalea! Wait a minute. (*He goes to door at rear, looks into the hall, closes the curtains carefully and returns to the phone, speaking in a low voice.*) Azalea . . . you shouldn't have called me here. What . . . *what!* Your husband? He found my letters? All of them? Just the sonnets? Good God! No . . . no . . . you mustn't come . . . you can't . . . my wife is here. What? Your husband's coming . . . what . . . hello . . . hello . . . Central . . . I've been cut off . . . oh, damn! (*He bangs down the phone and strides desperately about the room.* JANE *pulls aside the curtains at the back.*)

JANE

Why on earth are *these* closed? Oh . . . I thought I heard the phone!

WILFORT

No . . . yes . . . at least it *did* ring.

JANE

Who called?

WILFORT (*desperately*)

Wrong number. How about those apricots? Won't they burn or something if you don't stir 'em up?

JANE

They're cooling. I'll just dust the room. (*She crosses to desk and takes a duster from the drawer. Sees paper he has been writing on.*) You aren't through, are you? (*Reads.*) To my Lady of Gold. Who is she, Willy? Your last lady-love had red hair, didn't she?

WILFORT (*nervously*)

No. Black. . . . At least I guess so. . . . Hang it all . . . I don't remember.

(*He fidgets with the mantel ornaments.*)

JANE
For goodness' sakes sit down. You needn't get upset like that. I'm not objecting. I suppose a poet must have affairs and I'll say this for you, Willy: They never last long enough to make me nervous. But some day, my dear . . . some day you'll run up against a husband and come a cropper!

WILFORT (*wildly*)
Oh!
(*He drops a vase off the mantel and smashes it.*)

JANE
What *does* make you so nervous? Here . . . you'd better sit down! (*She pushes him onto the hassock.*) What's wrong, Willy?

WILFORT (*clinging to her hands*)
Jane . . . I . . . I . . .

JANE
Why . . . whatever is the matter?

WILFORT
I've *got* to tell you!

JANE
There . . . there . . . go ahead and tell me.

WILFORT
It's another woman.

JANE (*breathing a sigh of relief*)
Oh . . . is *that* all? I thought it was something serious!

WILFORT
He found my letters.

JANE
Who . . . what letters?

WILFORT
Her husband. He found some sonnets I'd sent her.

JANE
Why *will* women leave things around? (*She is sweeping up the scraps from the hearth and looks at them thoughtfully.*) I don't think it is entirely smashed, Willy. I can stick it together with some of that stick'em stuff.

WILFORT (*tragically*)
How *can* you stand there talking about that damn crockery when I'm telling you about Azalea!

JANE
Azalea?

WILFORT
The woman . . .

JANE
Oh . . . the one with the husband. Well . . . why get upset about it? It's her affair. She's got to settle it with him.

WILFORT
But they're coming here!

JANE (*putting the scraps of vase on the mantel and turning on him*)
Here? They're coming *here?*

WILFORT (*miserably*)
Yes. She says her husband is going to shoot me. She's coming to prevent it.

JANE
And the room not swept nor anything! Willy, how *could* you! Run right out on the back porch and bring in the sweeper. (*She begins hurriedly picking up the papers from the floor.*)

WILFORT
How *can* you stand there talking when Azalea's husband is coming?

JANE
Do you *want* him to see the house looking like this?

WILFORT
Oh!
(*He sinks down into the chair, his head on his hands.*)

JANE (*dusting*)
He may not be a good shot, Willy. (WILFORT *groans.*) By the way, just what sonnets were they?

WILFORT
Those Pilkington ones about "When at night my thoughts are turning."

JANE
Oh . . . those! I thought you'd used them up on the Altmont woman.

WILFORT
With a little rehashing I made 'em do. (*In sudden thought.*) I don't see *how* you can stand there dusting when any minute he may be here!

JANE (*soothingly*)
Yes, dear. Have you a clean shirt?

WILFORT
Yes—at least—no—my God! How should I know!

JANE
There's one in the sewing-room. Go put it on. And your green tie, Willy, not that awful red thing.

WILFORT
I don't see how you can go on talking about shirts and ties and things when her husband . . .
(*He is starting for the door.*)

JANE (*interrupting*)
And in the meantime I'll fix up the tea table.

WILFORT (*stopping*)
The *tea* table!

JANE
Yes, dear, when in doubt, serve tea!

WILFORT (*desperately*)
I don't see how you can go on wheeling that thing when you know that Azalea's husband . . . (JANE *gently shoves the table ahead of her, pushing him toward the door as he talks*) is coming to shoot me. . . .

JANE
Willy, please stop talking and change that shirt.

WILFORT
My God!
(*He grabs his head and exits tragically.*)

JANE (*at door, calling down the hall*)
And Willy . . . Willy . . . there's a hole in those socks!
(*She stops long enough to arrange the curtains at the door, then passes out of sight as* AZALEA WARING *enters through the French windows.* AZALEA *is slender with rather wild bobbed hair and is dressed overfashionably. It is obvious that she is the spoiled resultant of an overindulgent husband. She steps cautiously in and looks about with a frightened air, twisting her gloves in her fingers. She starts to explore the room, finally reaching the portières at the back. A sound sends her flying down stage again. It is* JANE, *returning with a dust pan and brush.*)

JANE (*stopping at sight of* AZALEA)
Oh! I beg your pardon. I didn't hear any one ring.

AZALEA (*attempting to be brazen*)
I didn't ring. I wanted to see Mr. Wendall alone.

JANE
I'm afraid you can't see him just now.

AZALEA
I *will* see him! You shan't keep me from him!

JANE
But I really think you'd better wait.

AZALEA
Don't try to detain me . . . I am going to him.

JANE
If you insist . . . it's the second door to the left.
(AZALEA *has reached the curtains at the back. There is a bang in the hall without and* WILFORT'S *voice roars from the distance.*)

WILFORT
Jane! Jane! Where is that damn shirt?

AZALEA
Oh!
(*She retreats down stage.*)

JANE (*going to the back and calling*)
The second drawer in the sewing-room, Willy. (*Coming down stage.*) You had much better wait, Mrs. Waring.

AZALEA
You know who I am?

JANE
Yes . . . at least . . . I think I'm not mistaken, am I? I can't be quite sure because of your hair.

AZALEA
My hair?

JANE
It's dark, you know. I had an idea . . . something my husband wrote made me think it was yellow.

AZALEA
Something he wrote?

JANE (*picking paper from desk*)
His newest sonnet, "To my Lady of Gold."

AZALEA (*turning away*)
Oh!

JANE (*chattily*)
But of course poets are like that, aren't they, always changing their minds about hair and complexions.

AZALEA (*desperately*)
Mrs. Wendall. I didn't come here to-day to talk about complexions.

JANE
Didn't you really?

AZALEA
No. . . . I . . . I came to prevent a terrible tragedy.

JANE
Dear me . . . how very nice of you!

AZALEA
My husband . . . your husband . . . at least I mean, my husband . . .

JANE (*helpfully*)
You seem to have gotten them mixed. Hadn't you better start fresh?

AZALEA
You don't understand. My husband is coming to shoot yours!

JANE (*suddenly turning her back on* AZALEA)
Would you mind just untying that apron? The knot has slipped.

AZALEA (*untying the apron in spite of herself and talking over* JANE'S *shoulder*)
I said my husband was coming to shoot yours!

JANE (*taking off apron*)
There . . . thank you . . . that's better. It seems to me Willy *did* speak about that.

AZALEA
You *knew!*

JANE
Yes . . . at least, he was upset about shooting or something of the kind.

AZALEA
And you let him stay here to meet his death?

JANE (*folding apron*)
Well . . . I didn't know your husband was so good at shooting people.

AZALEA (*indignantly*)
He isn't . . . he never shot any one in his life! How can you stand there like that and accuse him of such a thing?

JANE (*calmly patting her shoulder*)
Wait, my dear . . . wait a minute. (*She goes out rear door.* AZALEA *remains, wringing her hands and looking wildly about the room.* JANE *returns comfortably trundling the tea table.*) There . . . that's what you need! A cup of tea.

AZALEA (*wildly*)
Tea! Tea! Ha! Ha!
(*She is almost hysterical.*)

JANE (*pouring water from a copper kettle over a spirit lamp into the cup dips in a tea ball*)
There's nothing like tea for the nerves.

AZALEA
And you can sit there drinking tea when my husband is going to shoot yours?

JANE
How do you know he is? Perhaps Willy will shoot him.

AZALEA
No! No! . . .

JANE
Anyway, did you ever hear of any one shooting any one else while he was drinking tea?

AZALEA (*struck with the idea*)
No, at least I don't remember . . .

JANE (*triumphantly*)
Well, then! I tell you . . . there's nothing like tea!

AZALEA
But you don't realize . . . .

JANE
Sugar?

AZALEA
One lump. The terrible rage my husband . . .

JANE
And cream?

AZALEA
No cream, please . . . lemon. The terrible rage he was in. . . .

JANE
Will you have some cake? It's rather fresh and mussy but I like this receipt.

AZALEA (*forgetting for a minute*)
It's marshmallow? Do you use the yolks of the eggs?

JANE
No . . . just the whites and beat for twenty minutes.

AZALEA
With a wire whip. So do I. It's John's favorite kind.

JANE
John?

AZALEA
My husband. . . .
(*There is a crash without and a violent banging.*)

JANE
Ah . . . I fancy that is your husband now.

AZALEA
Oh! And I haven't talked to Wilfort! He'll be killed.

JANE
Here. . . . Just hold this a moment!
(*She shoves a tea cup into* AZALEA'S *hand and pushes her onto the couch beside the tea table.* JOHN WARING *opens the door and stalks in. He is rather a rotund business man in the early forties. His face, usually cheerful, is twisted into a scowl. He has managed to work his easy going temper into a pitch of righteous rage and is ripe for anything, even murder.*)

JOHN
Azalea! Why are you here?

JANE (*calmly*)
Mrs. Waring is having tea with me.

JOHN
You? Who are you?

JANE
I am Mrs. Wendall.

JOHN
The wife of that . . . that miserable little . . .
(*He chokes with rage.*)

AZALEA
John! Don't.

JOHN
Where is he? I want to see him! I want to kill him.

JANE (*soothingly*)
Yes, yes, but you'll have to wait a minute. He's shaving and really . . . you can't go shooting a man who's shaving; it would be too messy . . . the lather and everything!

JOHN
I won't be put off! I insist upon his coming down! I mean to face him with *these* and ram them down his throat before he dies.

AZALEA
Oh! OH!

JANE
Oh, yes . . . those sonnets. . . . Are you sure you've really looked them over, Mr. Waring? Have you thought how ridiculous they'd make you appear when they're read at the trial?

JOHN
Trial? What trial?

JANE
When they try you for killing Willy, of course. There's always a trial.

JOHN (*standing by his rights*)
You can't frighten me off that way! I should welcome a trial. Every outraged husband in the country would be on my side!

JANE (*bending over the spirit lamp*)
Yes, yes, of course. But then, the number of outraged husbands in the country is not very large, is it? And there are so many other people. The outraged husbands would be quite lost in the shuffle. And then, there are the sonnets. They'd be sure to be read in court, and there's something too awfully funny about a husband who goes ramping around shooting poets and ramming sonnets down their throats. I don't know why sonnets are so funny, but they are. They're good for a laugh any time.

JOHN
Woman . . . *will you be still!* Do you mean to stand there and tell me that you think I ought to let this outrageous affront to my honor go unpunished?

JANE
Goodness! Were they as bad as that?

JOHN
Were *what* as bad?

JANE
The sonnets.

JOHN
Madam! Can't you understand? It isn't the sonnets . . .

it's the principle of the thing. A miserable blackguard breaks into my home and makes love to my wife. Do you think as outraged manhood I shall permit it to go on . . . that I shall leave the traitor unpunished . . . that I shall let him go on breaking up other happy homes?
(*He is pawing the air with one hand and waving the sonnets with the other.*)

JANE
Yes, yes, of course. Here is your tea.

JOHN (*stupefied*)
My *what?*

JANE
Your tea.
(*She hands out the cup, smiling sweetly and he accepts it in sheer astonishment. She approaches him with a little tray which contains sugar, cream and lemon. Suddenly he realizes that he is trapped.*)

JOHN
I don't want any!

JANE
No sugar? *Do* have some sugar!

AZALEA
He always takes sugar in his tea.

JOHN
I tell you I don't *want* any!

JANE (*to* AZALEA)
One lump?

AZALEA
No . . . two.

JANE (*dropping in the sugar*)
And lemon?

JOHN (*roaring*)
I tell you I won't have any!

JANE
No lemon! Cream then. Say when.
(*She pours in cream.*)

JOHN (*wildly*)
I tell you I can't stand here drinking tea when that—that miserable . . .

JANE
Then why don't you sit down?
(*She pushes him onto the sofa beside his wife.*)

JOHN (*more desperately*)
I will *not* sit here drinking tea while that—that miserable little runt . . .

JANE
And some cake? Do have some cake! Your wife tells me it's your favorite kind!

JOHN (*softening for the moment. He jams the sonnets in his pocket.*)
Marshmallow! (JANE *helps him to a generous slice. He suddenly recovers himself.*) Take it away! I don't want it!
(JANE *has already removed the cake plate and he is obliged to hold the sticky wedge in the air.*)

JANE (*arranging a fringed napkin over his knees*)
There, now you're all comfy!

JOHN (*his mind still on his griefs*)
Madam! I tell you I am *not* comfy! I will *not* sit here and drink tea. . . . I demand to see that miserable cur. . . .
(*The portières at the rear part and* WILFORT *comes in. His hair is slicked back and he looks too good to live.*)

JOHN
Wendall!

WILFORT (*trying to be at ease*)
Ah . . . Waring. . . . Having tea I see . . . and Mrs. Waring!

JOHN (*waving the cake*)
Don't you dare address my wife, sir!

JANE
No, Wilfort! Really you mustn't! Mr. Waring is annoyed with you!

JOHN
Annoyed! I'm furious, sir, furious! I have come to call you to account! I have come to settle the matter with you! To settle it in the only way it can be settled. . . . I say the only way! (*This heroic speech has been somewhat hampered by the fact that one hand holds the cake, the other his tea and the napkin keeps slipping off his lap. In the end he manages to stick the corner of the napkin in the front of his vest and it hangs like a bib during the ensuing scene. At the end of his speech he gesticulates with his right hand, endangering his cup.*) By your death, sir! By your death!

AZALEA
John! You are spilling your tea!

JANE
Let him spill it if he wants to. You can't blame him for being upset!

JOHN (*pawing the air*)
Upset!

AZALEA
You're crumbling your cake on the rug!

JANE
It won't hurt it. We've a vacuum cleaner.

JOHN
How *can* you stand there talking about vacuum cleaners when your husband is philandering with my wife? Haven't you a particle of womanly feeling?

JANE
I didn't know you came here to discuss my feelings.

JOHN
I demand an answer to my question.

JANE
Well, if you really want to know . . . I'd say that if Willy thinks he'd like to go off with your wife, I won't try to stop him.

JOHN, WILFORT, AZALEA (*all together*)
Go off with my wife . . . !
Don't mind my feelings!
How dare you say such a thing!

JANE
Really . . . any one would think you'd all come here to attack me!

JOHN (*suddenly remembering*)
No! I came to choke a low down cur with his second class doggerel!

AZALEA
John!

WILFORT
Doggerel. Don't you dare call it doggerel! Just because you aren't capable of understanding real poetry when you read it, you with your middle-class, stock-jobbing mind of a shopkeeper. . . .
(*He is prepared to fly at* JOHN'S *throat.*)

JANE
There, there, Willy . . . here's your tea!
(WILFORT *takes the tea absently.*)

JOHN (*emboldened by his adversary's being engaged with the tea cup.*)
I repeat, Doggerel, Doggerelllllll!

WILFORT
I'll kill you for that!
(*He starts forward, spilling his tea.*)

JANE
Willy! You've spilled it on the rug!

WILFORT
I don't care if I have.

JANE (*taking duster from drawer*)
There . . . just wipe it up before it soaks in . . . that's a dear boy.

WILFORT (*wiping in spite of himself*)
Damn the rug. You told *him* it didn't matter!

JANE
But he's company, dear!

WILFORT
Company when he comes to kill me?

JOHN (*reawakening to his wrongs*)
And, by Jove, I mean to do it!

AZALEA
John . . . don't!
(*She grabs him by his coat tails.*)

JANE (*comfortably*)
Your tea is getting cold. Let me put a little more hot water into it.

(She manages to get between the two men with the kettle of hot water and by spilling it on their toes she forces them apart. The men stand glaring at each other over their tea cups. She ignores them and chats cheerfully as she rearranges the tea table.)

JANE

Now while we're all comfortable, let's talk this thing over sensibly. Five years ago when problem plays were so popular Willy and Mrs. Waring could walk right out that door hand in hand but now with the housing problem what it is, where would they walk to? They can't live in the park.

JOHN

That isn't the question at all!

JANE

But it's *a* question . . . you'll have to admit. Now I suppose I might let them have this house, but then what would become of me? I don't imagine I could find a room to rent in the whole avenue unless . . . (*Her eye lights with inspiration.*) Of course, how stupid of me! If Mrs. Waring comes here, you'll have a spare room, won't you?

WILFORT

Jane . . . how can you stand there talking like that!

JOHN

How can you!

AZALEA

How *can* you!

JANE

It seems to me all afternoon some one has been asking me how I *can* stand there, but nobody suggests any way out. Now I'm willing to forget my feelings and move over to Mr. Waring's . . . I might even get fond of Mr. Waring in time. . . .

WILFORT
I'll be damned if you will—I'll not allow it!

AZALEA
John! How can you listen to that woman standing there?

JOHN
Since you take this thing so calmly, madam, suppose you read what your husband has been sending my wife!
(*He balances his cake on the side of his saucer, reaches in his pocket and produces the sonnets. After handing them over he stands majestically eating cake while she reads them. He manages to impart an air of triumph to his eating, but gets the marshmallow around his mouth. They all watch* JANE *as she reads.*)

JANE
"When my thoughts at night are turning. . . ." Um, yes. . . . (*Takes a second sheet.*) "Meshed within the shadows of your purple hair." . . . It was red originally, wasn't it, Willy . . . ? I mean in the poem, of course. (*Another sheet.*) And, "Thoughts Like a Sea-Gull." I always liked that one. (*Hastily running through the pages, she turns to* WILFORT.) Really, Willy . . . I don't blame Mr. Waring for being angry. The idea of sending those old things to his wife!

AZALEA (*shrilly*)
Old things! Why he wrote them especially for me!

JANE
Well . . . I don't like to contradict you, but really . . .

JOHN (*furiously*)
You're missing the point! I don't give a hang when they were written. I simply won't have your husband sending passionate verses to my wife.

JANE (*relieved*)
Oh . . . if you're only angry because you think they're

passionate you needn't worry a bit! They aren't passionate at all.

JOHN
They are . . . they're damnably passionate.

JANE
There, there . . . you're dreadfully mistaken and I can prove it!

JOHN
In Heaven's name, how?

JANE (*crossing to desk and producing a letter*)
There . . . that's a letter from the editor of Pilkington's Magazine. You'll have to admit *he's* a good judge of poetry. He declined them three years ago because they were too coldly academic!

AZALEA (*furiously*)
Three years ago! And you dared warm over second-hand sonnets and use them on me!

WILFORT (*gloomily*)
Well, you *did* demand so much poetry. I couldn't be turning out new stuff all the time. You seemed to think I was a literary sausage machine.

AZALEA
And I suppose you'd used them on lots of other women?

JANE
Not lots, my dear, just four or five.

AZALEA (*wildly*)
Oh!
(*She turns away.*)

JOHN (*furiously*)
Well, you can't treat *my* wife like that. I'm going to put a stop to your philandering.
(*He resolutely puts down his cup of tea.*)

WILFORT (*dropping down on the hassock, gloomily, his head in his hands.*)
I wish to God you would!

JOHN
What do you mean, sir?

WILFORT
Do you think I enjoy this sort of thing? Having husbands ramping in just when I'm getting comfortably to work on a new poem? Do you think I *want* to have women calling me up and making me rush over to hold their hands just because I'm naturally sympathetic and their husbands don't understand 'em?

AZALEA
Do you mean to insinuate that *I* made you come over and hold my hand?

JOHN
You damn cad!

JANE
Willy . . . that's not polite!

WILFORT (*desperately*)
She *did* call me up and she *did* say he didn't understand her. I don't think anybody does. I wish to God I'd never tried!

AZALEA (*in tears*)
John! Are you going to stand there and let him insult me . . . why don't you shoot him?

WILFORT
That's right! Go ahead and shoot. That's the only way you damn Philistines know how to handle a poet.

JANE
Willy . . . I won't have you calling our company names!

WILFORT (*wildly*)
Then stop calling me Willy. You *know* I don't like it! Here's a man come to shoot me and the best you can do is to go right on standing there and calling me Willy!

JANE
Did you ever hear of any one shooting a man named Willy?

WILFORT
Of course not!

JANE
Well, then!

JOHN
But that argument is ridiculous.

JANE
So's everything else we've said this afternoon!

JOHN
Then I'm going to stop talking and act! (*He draws a pistol from pocket.*) I'm going to shoot your husband!

WILFORT
Oh!
(*He turns toward fireplace.*)

AZALEA
John!
(*She screams and hides her eyes.*)

JANE
Wait! Would you mind doing it in the bathroom?

JOHN (*stopping in spite of himself*)
Why?

JANE
Willy's so thin. The last husband that tried to kill him missed him and hit this vase.
(*She picks up the remains of the vase from the mantel.*)

JOHN (*slings the revolver on the floor in a rage*)
Oh . . . I won't be just one of a procession of husbands that misses your husband. I won't give you that satisfaction!

AZALEA (*peering through her fingers*)
Aren't you going to shoot him after all?

JOHN (*shouting*)
No!

AZALEA
Oh! After all the things he said about me! You never do a single thing I ask you!
(*She goes off into a torrent of tears.*)

JOHN
My God!
(*He mops away with his handkerchief.*)

JANE
While you've got your handkerchief, wipe your mouth.

JOHN
My mouth?

JANE
Marshmallow!

JOHN
Do you mean to say you've let me go around . . .

JANE (*sweetly*)
May I have my napkin?

JOHN (*catching sight of napkin still hanging on his front*)
And that!

JANE
There's a little more on your cheek.
(*She starts wiping it off, holding onto his lapels.*)

AZALEA
John . . . don't let that woman touch you!

JOHN (*trying to break away*)
Oh, DAMN!

JANE
You mustn't swear at your wife, really you mustn't.

AZALEA (*wailing*)
You swore at me and I want to go home. . . . I want to go home away from that awful woman. . . . (*She rushes madly to the door.*) John, come away from her!

JOHN
I'm coming, my love . . . I'm coming. . . .

JANE
Wait . . . you've forgotten your hat and stick. . . .
(*She finds them and hands them over.*)

AZALEA
JOHN!

JOHN
Yes, dear.
(*He rushes to the door.*)

JANE (*reaching to the floor and running after him*)
Your pistol . . . you've forgotten your pistol.

AZALEA (*from without*)
JOHN!!

JOHN

Damn the pistol!

(*He rushes after his wife.*)

(JANE *stands holding the pistol and looking at* WILFORT *who is at the other side of the room completely lost in his poem and muttering gold, told, cold. The telephone rings and she runs across to it, still holding the pistol.*)

JANE

Hello . . . yes . . . yes . . . he's here. (*She turns to* WILFORT.) A lady to speak to you, Willy. I think it's your lady of gold!

CURTAIN

GAS, AIR AND EARL

A Frivolous Comedy

by Bertram Bloch

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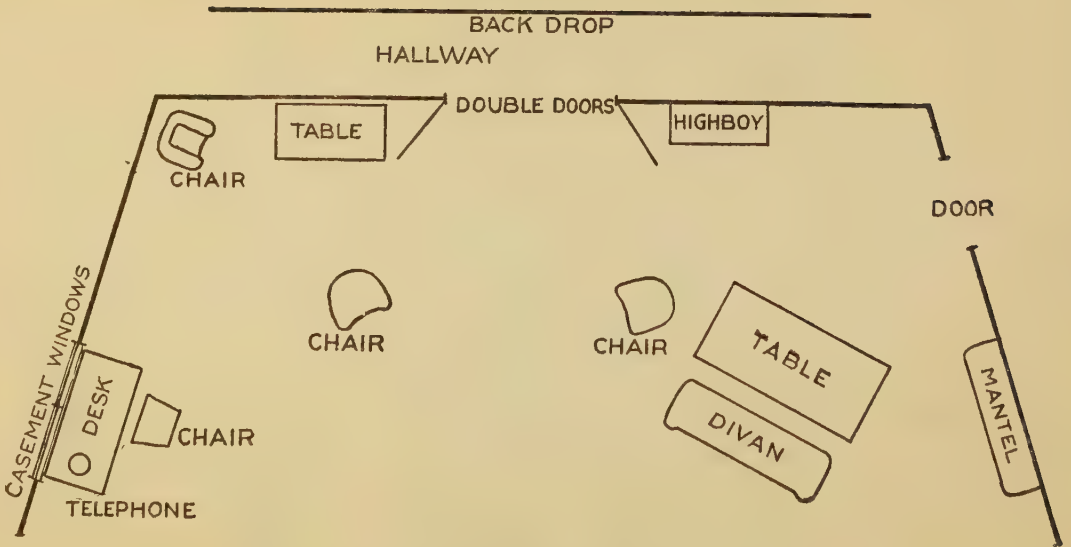
GAS, AIR AND EARL

The author of "Gas, Air and Earl" supplied excellent stage direction when he styled his entertaining comedy "frivolous." The director and cast should keep this in mind and play it lightly, maintaining farce tempo throughout. Elinor and Boggs should be made very natural and should subtly suggest their sense of humor in contrast to Mrs. Plummer's and Kitty Carson's lack of it. The play presents no difficulties either in setting or in action. If the setting can capture the New England atmosphere of a Maine hotel, its sedateness and solidity will provide silent commentary on the conduct of its occupants. The parts are equally good and if it is deftly played by a well-balanced cast, it will prove a bright spot in the evening's program.

PROPERTY LIST

For Mrs. Plummer
- Smelling salts
- Stack of bills



STAGE PLAN FOR "GAS, AIR AND EARL"

GAS, AIR AND EARL

CHARACTERS

ELINOR PLUMMER
MRS. PLUMMER, *her mother*
KITTY CARSON, *a friend—but not so much of a friend*
BOGGS, *alias Brown, alias Cavendish—a chauffeur*
A LAWYER

AT RISE: MRS. PLUMMER'S *sitting room at Kiantha Inn, a huge hotel on the Maine coast.* MRS. PLUMMER, *in becoming negligee, is sitting at a little desk, a pile of bills before her.* MRS. PLUMMER *looks forty-five, tries to look thirty-five and is actually fifty-five. Her hair, after many changes, is again blonde. She is kindly but stupid. The telephone rings.*

MRS. PLUMMER (*startled. Obviously the ringing of the phone is usually a prelude to trouble; she summons up courage, however, and answers*)
Hello. Yes, this is Mrs. Plummer. . . . Who? Oh, the manager. . . . What do I intend doing? Doing about what? Oh, my plans. . . . Why, I expect to stay on here at the hotel, of course. . . . Yes, I know I said I'd let you have a check yesterday, but you'll have to wait another few days—my alimony hasn't come. You see, Mr. Plummer has so many alimonies to pay he sometimes gets them mixed up. . . . (*The party at the other end has evidently said something startling.*) What! By to-morrow noon!

You wouldn't dare to put me out! Sir, do you realize whom you are talking to? My ancestors came over in the *Mayflower*. . . . What? You wonder who paid their passage? . . . Sir! (*She is vastly indignant and is thinking up a devastating reply, but the manager hangs up.*) You . . . (*Then she jiggles the phone back and forth. Unsuccessful in getting him, she hangs up the receiver. Her nerves are in shreds. She gets a huge bottle of smelling-salts and gives herself first aid. There comes a knock at the door, and in her alarm* MRS. PLUMMER *almost falls out of her chair.*)

MRS. PLUMMER (*in a tense whisper*)
Who is it?

FEMININE VOICE
Me!

MRS. PLUMMER
Who's me?

FEMININE VOICE
Kitty Carson. Let me in. I've got the most exciting news!

MRS. PLUMMER
Has it anything to do with bills?

FEMININE VOICE
No, no. Do let me in.
(*Taking another whiff of her salts,* MRS. PLUMMER *summons up strength enough to go to the door. She unlocks it and* KITTY CARSON *enters.* KITTY CARSON *is about as old as* MRS. PLUMMER *wishes she was—thirty-five; she is smartly dressed and violently made up.*)

KITTY
Josephine, what do you think? My chauffeur's an earl!

MRS. PLUMMER
A girl?

KITTY
An earl! An English earl! An English lawyer just came to see me—he's a thin man—

MRS. PLUMMER
You needn't describe him—lawyers are no novelty to me.

KITTY
We talked sports a little. His son is a halfback on the Oxford team. He was so proud that he'd given a halfback to Oxford.

MRS. PLUMMER
I should think he would be—that's the first time any lawyer has ever given anything back to any one.

KITTY
Then we talked about America.

MRS. PLUMMER
He'll charge you for it.

KITTY
Oh, no, he's not going to charge me anything.

MRS. PLUMMER
Kitty! That man was deceiving you—he wasn't a lawyer.

KITTY
But he is. He's representing an estate. You see, the Earl of Chelsea died two months ago and his only heir is the son of a younger brother who ran away to America a year ago and hasn't been heard from since.

MRS. PLUMMER
Just like the Democratic party. You say this young man is an English nobleman? Have they looked for him on Long Island?

KITTY
He's not on Long Island—he's right here—in this hotel—he's my—chauffeur!

MRS. PLUMMER
Boggs! Your Boggs is an earl!

KITTY
Didn't I tell you I didn't think his name was really Boggs?

MRS. PLUMMER
And didn't I tell you his manners were too bad for him to be a chauffeur?

KITTY
I'm so excited! Wait till the next traffic cop stops us! Won't I tell him who's driving me though!

MRS. PLUMMER
That won't help you any. I was going to a D.A.R. pageant once where I was to play Cleopatra and an officer arrested me. I told him I couldn't stop because I was Cleopatra, and do you know what he said? He said that he was the snake and that if I didn't draw up to the curb he'd bite me and give me bloodpoisoning. Now my advice is, Kitty . . .

KITTY
I haven't time to hear any advice, Josephine. What I really came in to tell you was that I couldn't go to the Falls with you to-day. You see— (*She smiles archly.*) I'm going to let Boggs—I mean, the earl—drive me alone.

MRS. PLUMMER
Is he staying on, now that he's an earl?

KITTY (*more arch than ever*)
Ah, he doesn't know it yet. I told the lawyer that he was away and wouldn't be back until the end of the week.

MRS. PLUMMER
Why did you tell him that?

KITTY
Because I'm going to make the earl propose to me before he finds out he is an earl. Wasn't that clever of me?

MRS. PLUMMER (*agape at such cleverness*)
You're going to marry him?

KITTY
Of course. He's an earl with three castles and an income of two hundred and forty thousand a year. (*She rises.*) Ta-ta. Sorry I can't take you to the Falls, but business before pleasure. Hope you'll call on me at one of the castles. Topping weather, we're having, isn't it, by Jove? (*She whirls out, leaving* MRS. PLUMMER *breathless. Then* MRS. PLUMMER *locks the door and sits down and weeps. She is shaking with sobs when there comes a terrific beating on the door.* MRS. PLUMMER *very nearly dies right there of heart failure. She ducks behind the desk. The rat-at-tat-tat continues.*)

MRS. PLUMMER (*affecting a French accent*)
The Madame ees out.

VOICE
Don't be a goose, mother; let me in.

MRS. PLUMMER
Oh, it's you!
(*Angry, she opens the door and admits her daughter* ELINOR. ELINOR *is—well—she's the heroine, so nothing more need be said.*)

MRS. PLUMMER
Haven't you better sense than to frighten me like that! I thought it was the manager.

ELINOR
Oh, mother, he isn't pursuing you, is he?

MRS. PLUMMER
He's threatening to put us out.

ELINOR
Oh, he can't do that, I've got dates for the rest of the week.

MRS. PLUMMER
I know you have—callous creature. That's all you think about—your pleasure, while I sit here and watch the bills pour in.

ELINOR
That's really very foolish, mummy, 'cause if we should lose them the people we owe money to would be kind enough to send us others, I'm sure. Hasn't your alimony come yet? (MRS. PLUMMER *shakes her head.*) Dear mummy, you certainly did exercise bad business judgment when you divorced my stepfather. At least he did pay *some* bills when you were married to him. . . . And I've got to have some money, mummy—I dropped twenty-five dollars playing golf this morning.

MRS. PLUMMER
You can't pay it.

ELINOR
I must. I lost it to the Stephen-Sewards.

MRS. PLUMMER
They've got millions.

ELINOR
That's why I've got to pay them. It's only people who have less than you have you can afford not to pay.

MRS. PLUMMER
Oh, dear, why did I ever give up our car!

ELINOR
We didn't give it up, mother, they took it away from us.

MRS. PLUMMER
If we had that now, our chauffeur might have turned out to be an earl with millions, too.
(ELINOR *looks at her mother anxiously.*)

ELINOR
Mummy, do you feel all right?

MRS. PLUMMER
Of course I'm all right.

ELINOR
Sure there isn't any buzzing in your head—or dizzy feeling?

MRS. PLUMMER
Oh, so you think chauffeurs never turn out to have titles?

ELINOR
I know they do. Don't you remember the one we called Carruthers? His real title, the detectives said, was Billy the Yegg, duke of Sing Sing.

MRS. PLUMMER
Well, this one is an Earl—Earl of Chelsea—and Kitty Carson is going to marry him. . . . There's no justice in this world. Why should Kitty Carson have the chance to marry an earl just because she was lucky enough to lose her husband six months ago!

ELINOR
Are you trying to tell me that Kitty Carson's chauffeur has turned out to be an earl?

MRS. PLUMMER (*suddenly gripping her daugnter's arm*)
Elinor! Why should Kitty Carson get that title and two hundred thousand a year? Why shouldn't we get it?

ELINOR
Mother! You're not going to marry for the fourth time?

MRS. PLUMMER (*sighing*)
I—I wouldn't mind having a man, to protect me, but I'm afraid until I get my face lifted there's no chance. . . . It's you, my darling, you.

ELINOR
Me marry a chauffeur!

MRS. PLUMMER
He's a chauffeur in name only, darling; he's really an earl. Surely you don't object to marry an earl?

ELINOR
No, but I'd prefer to have my earl less mixed with gas.

MRS. PLUMMER
Ducky, you'll live in England where no one would ever know he had been a chauffeur.

ELINOR
And every time I'd see him enter a room I'd say, "Home, James," before I'd had a chance to think.

MRS. PLUMMER
But his name isn't James. (*She goes to the phone.*) Garage, please.

ELINOR (*in alarm*)
Mother, what are you doing?

MRS. PLUMMER
I'm phoning him to come up here.

ELINOR
The chauffeur?

MRS. PLUMMER
The earl, dear.

ELINOR
What for?

MRS. PLUMMER
You must win him. . . . (*In the phone.*) Garage? Is Boggs there? Mrs. Carson's Boggs? I'd like to speak to him. . . . (ELINOR *has run up to her and is trying to tear her from the phone.*)

ELINOR
Mother, you're mad! Hang up that receiver this minute.

MRS. PLUMMER (*frigidly*)
Elinor, unhand me! Remember I am still your mother! (*Into the phone, very sweetly.*) Mr. Boggs? This is Mrs. Plummer speaking. Mrs. Carson asked me to tell you that she is waiting for you in my rooms. Will you please come and get a message from her. . . . Thank you. (*She hangs up.*) He does sound like an earl. I wonder I never noticed it before.

ELINOR
Mother, how could you!

MRS. PLUMMER
You'll have to work fast, darling, because if you don't get him this morning Kitty Carson will this afternoon.

ELINOR
I won't do it!

MRS. PLUMMER (*dropping to her knees*)
Darling, for your gray-haired mother's sake! (*As she notes* ELINOR'S *eyes traveling to her blonde hair.*) Well, it would be gray if I'd let it! Elly, think what this will mean to us! All our debts paid, no more worries, mingling with royalty, maybe even sitting at the same table with the king and queen. Elly, think of it, married to a peer of England!

ELINOR
Who eats pies with a knife.

MRS. PLUMMER
You needn't live with him very much, darling—he has three castles, you know. You can live in one castle while he lives in another, and if he comes to your castle you can go to the third one.

ELINOR
When I get married I want it to be marriage, not tag. So long. See you at lunch.
(*She starts to go.*)

MRS. PLUMMER (*panic-stricken*)
You are going to desert me? Darling, I'll kill myself.

ELINOR
Don't be silly, mother.
(*But her mother has thrown herself on the floor weeping.* ELINOR *runs over to her and tries to raise her up.*)

MRS. PLUMMER (*struggling to get back to her position on the floor*)
Let me alone! What do you care? Ungrateful girl that you are! What do you care if I starve to death! Go on! Go away to your games! Don't marry the earl! Let me die! What difference does it make . . . (ELINOR *tries to interrupt the flow but can't.*) I'm just your mother! You don't owe me anything! I'm just an old fool! I'm just a simpleton! I'm just . . .
(*There comes a knock at the door.* MRS. PLUMMER *stops and sits up.*)

MRS. PLUMMER
Elly, you'll do it?

ELINOR
All right. I suppose so.

MRS. PLUMMER (*rapturously*)
My darling! I always knew I could depend on you! (*She kisses her, then jumps up.*) Oh, dear, I must look a fright. (*The knock is repeated.*) One minute. Coming, coming, coming. . . .
(*These in her most dulcet tones. She opens the door and admits* BOGGS, *the chauffeur. He is tall, slender, good-looking.*)

MRS. PLUMMER
How do you do? Come right in.

BOGGS
Thank you.

MRS. PLUMMER
Mrs. Carson stepped out a moment. She'll be right back.

BOGGS
I'd better wait in the hall then.

MRS. PLUMMER
Oh, dear, no. The halls are so draughty. Stay in here. My daughter will be glad to entertain you. . . . Elinor, this is the (*She catches herself.*) I mean, this is Mr. Boggs, who drives Mrs. Carson's car so beautifully.

BOGGS
Glad to know you, Miss Plummer.

ELINOR
I've seen you before.

MRS. PLUMMER
In the car—of course, you have.

ELINOR
I've never gone out with Mrs. Carson. Ah! I remember. You were at the Yacht Club dance the other night.

MRS. PLUMMER
He couldn't have been, dear; Kitty Carson didn't go.

ELINOR
But he did. He was there as one of the guests. I danced five dances with him. He told me his name was Brown.

MRS. PLUMMER (*horrified to* BOGGS)
You went to the Yacht Club dance?!!

BOGGS (*embarrassed*)
Yes'm. I found an invitation lying in the road, so I borrowed a dress-suit and went. (*He turns to* ELINOR.) Lovely affair, wasn't it?

MRS. PLUMMER
You dared to go to that dance! To that exclusive affair! You—a plain, ordinary— (*Then she stops, suddenly remembering what he really is, she smiles feebly.*) Oh, yes, of course. . . . Why shouldn't you go? Isn't this a democratic country? Excuse me, Mr. Boggs—I've—I've got to get dressed. . . . My daughter will entertain you. (*To* ELINOR.) I'll be right in my bedroom if there's anything you want to tell me, darling. . . . (*To* BOGGS.) Make yourself right at home, Mr. Boggs.
(*With another simpering smile, she goes.*)
(*There is a moment's silence.* BOGGS *stands—hat in hand,* ELINOR *looks him over.*)

ELINOR
You did have your nerve going to that dance.

BOGGS
I went there to dance with you. You're a wonderful dancer.

ELINOR
Thanks. So are you. Unusually good. Where did you learn?

BOGGS
I took lessons from a correspondence school, miss.

ELINOR (*angrily*)
You think you're pretty clever, don't you?

BOGGS
I managed to get five dances with you, miss.

ELINOR
By lying about yourself.

BOGGS
All's fair in love and war, miss.

ELINOR
You don't mean to say you're in love with me?

BOGGS
Well, this isn't war, is it?

ELINOR
I think you'd better go.

BOGGS
I've had orders to wait for Mrs. Carson.

ELINOR
She isn't coming here.

BOGGS
I know that. She's having her hair waved and her face massaged. She's good for two hours there.

ELINOR
If you knew that why did you come here?

BOGGS
To find out why you wanted to see me.

ELINOR
I didn't. It was my mother who wanted to see you.

BOGGS (*looking around*)
So I notice.

ELINOR (*angrily*)
Are you going?

BOGGS (*meekly, when he sees she is really angry*)
I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you.

ELINOR
You're a nasty brute—even if you are an earl—and I wouldn't marry you for all the money in the world.

BOGGS
Even if I'm a what?

ELINOR
A brute.

BOGGS
I got that—but the other thing you called me?

ELINOR
An earl. Earl of Chelsea. You are, you know. Mrs. Carson just told us. There's an English lawyer here looking for you. She sent him away because she wants to marry you first. . . .

BOGGS
Marry me?

ELINOR
Yes, that's why she's having her hair waved and her face massaged.

BOGGS
Good Lord! And you brought me here to warn me?

ELINOR
No. We sent for you so that I could get you to propose before Mrs. Carson did.

BOGGS
I see. And what made you think I would propose?

ELINOR
I flatter myself I could have brought that about very easily.

BOGGS
You mean you thought that when I was a chauffeur I'd have been glad to get you. You must think very little of me.

ELINOR
My dear Earl, I've hardly thought of you at all.

BOGGS
You gave me five dances—me a stranger.

ELINOR (*hastily*)
Good-by. (*She holds out her hand.*) Good-by. Good luck.

BOGGS
You're angry with me!

ELINOR
No, I'm not. I forgive you everything.

BOGGS
Forgive me? For what?

ELINOR
For having deceived about your name, for having had the nerve to dance with me, and . . . (*She stops.*)

BOGGS
And?

ELINOR (*severely*)
For having dared to kiss me at the dance.

BOGGS (*fearfully embarrassed*)
I—I didn't know that you knew.

ELINOR
It was in the garden. While I was smelling the roses. You kissed my hair.

BOGGS
You didn't seem to notice.

ELINOR
I had a reason.

BOGGS
What was it?

ELINOR (*after considering very carefully*)
I don't know that I ought to tell you. . . . Still . . . since it's all over—and it may make you feel sad that you lost an opportunity—I hope it will torture you endlessly—well—I didn't say anything when I felt your lips on my hair because I hoped you wouldn't be satisfied with that. . . .

BOGGS (*excitedly*)
You would have let me kiss your lips—?

ELINOR
Restrain yourself. The garden was like a fairyland in the moonlight—we had just danced a divine waltz. (*Reflectively.*) I'd have let any good-looking man kiss me then, I'm afraid.

BOGGS (*crestfallen*)
Oh!

ELINOR (*derisively*)
You didn't think I was especially interested in you, did you?

BOGGS (*clumsily, because this is just what he did think*)
Why—I—

ELINOR
Well, I wasn't.

BOGGS (*boldly*)
You scratched four dances with other men to dance with me.

ELINOR
Did I? (*She thinks.*) That's true, so I did. But then they were such fearfully bad dancers and I felt so sorry for you. You looked so lonely and out of place—just—just like a man who was trying to be something he wasn't meant to be. My heart bled for you.

BOGGS
I don't believe that.

ELINOR
No?

BOGGS
If you'd felt sorry for me you might have danced with me once—but only once.

ELINOR
I've already told you that you dance well. I'd do anything to get a good partner.

BOGGS
Even to hoping he'd kiss you?

ELINOR
I didn't hope you'd kiss me.

BOGGS
You said it.

ELINOR
Never.

BOGGS
Just now.

ELINOR
Nonsense.

BOGGS
Do you mean to say you deny having said that?

ELINOR
The garden. Moonlight. That combination always makes a girl do silly things.

BOGGS
Don't say that. I love you.

ELINOR (*mockingly*)
Mr. Boggs!

BOGGS
I've loved you from the first minute I saw you . . .

ELINOR
At the dance?

BOGGS
No, I went to the dance because I knew you would be there. I saw you the day I arrived. I was cleaning the car back at the garage. You drove up with two men. I was so jealous of them that I slapped grease all over their car when you left.

ELINOR
You funny thing!

BOGGS
Will you marry me?

ELINOR
Are you serious?

BOGGS
Never more serious in my life.

ELINOR
Certainly I'll marry you. (*Then she releases herself.*) Didn't I tell you I could make you propose?

BOGGS (*crestfallen*)
This was just a trick?

ELINOR (*having gone to the door of her mother's bedroom*)
You can come out, mother; I've got him.

BOGGS
Then you won't marry me?

ELINOR
Of course I'll marry you—that's what I did it for. . . . I gave you your chance to get away, you remember. I warned you, but you thought you were so much cleverer than I was—well, now you'll have to pay the penalty.
(MRS. PLUMMER *rushes out of her room. She is in raptures. Also in her gaudiest clothes.*)

MRS. PLUMMER
My darling son! My darling earl! My darling—what is your Christian name?

BOGGS
Ted.

MRS. PLUMMER
It must be Theodore now you're an Earl! Theodore, may I embrace you?

BOGGS (*taken aback*)
Why—I—

MRS. PLUMMER
You dear boy!
(*And seizing him in her arms she squeezes him violently.*)

ELINOR
Mother! For Heaven's sake! Even earls fracture if you're not careful! He may be an earl—but you'll have him down for a count if you batter him around like that.

MRS. PLUMMER (*reluctantly releasing him*)
I am so happy. I haven't had such a joyful moment since the last judge awarded me alimony. Isn't it a beautiful world? The water, the air, the . . .

ELINOR
Gas.

MRS. PLUMMER
You mustn't ever utter that odious word again. When we get to England we must pretend that you don't know the first thing about motor-cars. You don't mind my making sweet little suggestions like that, do you?

BOGGS
Oh, not at all, only on this earl question . . .

MRS. PLUMMER (*interrupting him*)
Elinor, isn't it wonderful? Elinor, do you know how to bow when you see a king or a queen?

BOGGS
That really isn't important, Mrs. Plummer, because—
(*The door flies open and* MRS. CARSON *enters. She is half waved, half massaged, the cream still clinging to one side of her face.*)

KITTY (*seeing* BOGGS)
So! There you are! You deceiver! You villain! You wretch! How dared you pretend you were an earl when

you're nothing but a cheap chauffeur! And a bad one at that!

MRS. PLUMMER
Kitty! Kitty Carson, what are you saying?

KITTY
He isn't an earl! That lawyer—he sent me a message while I was having my hair dressed—this man— (*She points to* BOGGS.) He isn't the earl! The professional golfer—Mr. Sands—he's the earl!

ELINOR
The professional at the hotel?
(KITTY *nods.*)

KITTY
Yes, and I've never even played with him!

MRS. PLUMMER (*hopefully to* ELINOR)
But you've played with him, haven't you, darling? He's praised your game, hasn't he?

KITTY
I should say she has. She's with him all the time. It's been a scandal.

BOGGS
Isn't that the man you cut a dance with to dance with me?

MRS. PLUMMER
Of course she didn't.

ELINOR
But I did, mummy.

MRS. PLUMMER
Well, suppose you did. Every girl makes her little mistakes. Darling, Mr. San—I mean, the Earl—the Earl is very much interested in you, isn't he?

ELINOR
He proposed to me yesterday.

KITTY
Oh!
(*She bursts into tears.*)

MRS. PLUMMER
Oh, my darling! How wonderful! Why didn't you tell me?

ELINOR
I turned him down.

MRS. PLUMMER
You turned him—!!! You turned—!!! But of course you didn't know he was an earl then. Darling, go right downstairs and play a game with him and let him win so he'll be sure to propose again.
(*The telephone rings.*)

MRS. PLUMMER
Goodness! I wonder what that is. (*She goes to the phone.*) Hello? Who? Mrs. Carson? Yes, she is here. . . . Oh, the lawyer. . . . Yes. (*To* KITTY) Kitty, it's the lawyer. He wants to see you.

KITTY
I can't go running through the hotel like this.

ELINOR
Mother, tell the lawyer that the Mrs. Carson isn't seeable and he'd better come here.

MRS. PLUMMER (*in the phone*)
Would you mind coming to Room 203? Mrs. Carson will see you there. Thank you. . . . (*She hangs up.*) He's coming.

KITTY
Maybe it's another mistake. Maybe Mr. Boggs . . .

BOGGS
No. I'm not the earl. I was trying to tell Mrs. Plummer that when you came in.

MRS. PLUMMER
It was unnecessary. Anybody who knew anything at all about earls could see that with half an eye. . . . Elly, run and get your golf clubs.

ELINOR
What's the use? I'm engaged to Mr. Boggs.

MRS. PLUMMER
Don't be silly, child.

ELINOR
Listen, mother, I played a rotten trick on him—at your suggestion—because you thought he was an earl; I'm not going to play a rottener one on him now that we find out he isn't.

MRS. PLUMMER
But you can't marry a chauffeur, darling!

ELINOR
Why not? It's been done, hasn't it?

MRS. PLUMMER (*wringing her hands*)
But, darling, you can't live on what he makes!

ELINOR
He won't always be a chauffeur.

MRS. PLUMMER
No?

ELINOR
Some day he may own a taxicab.
(*There is a knock at the door.*)

KITTY
The lawyer. . . . Come in.
(*The lawyer enters.*)

LAWYER
Excuse me for intruding like this. . . . (*He sees* MRS. CARSON *and is alarmed at her wild look.*) Heavens—Mrs. Carson!

ELINOR
That's all right. She did a Gutzon Borglum—you know—ran away when the job was half-finished.

KITTY
I got your message—the golf-professional. . . .

LAWYER
It was another mistake. I've just had a wire from England. They've found the earl. He's a tobacco salesman. . . .

KITTY (*disappointed*)
Oh, dear! Still—what's his address?

LAWYER
He lives in London with his wife and eight children.

KITTY (*overwhelmed*)
My God! (*Then she turns to* ELINOR.) It's all your fault! I don't know just how but I'm sure it is! (*And she swings round on* BOGGS, *who has been standing behind a chair.*) Boggs, you're discharged! Do you hear? You're fired this minute! And I won't even give you a recommendation!
(*The* LAWYER *has turned, too, and is staring at* BOGGS with *his mouth open.*)

LAWYER

Why, Cavendish! So you're the mysterious Englishman our detectives thought was the earl! (*He goes over and shakes* BOGGS' *hand violently.*) I was told you had gone to America to write your new book—but I never expected to see you dressed up like this.

BOGGS

The best way to get to know a people is to work with them. Dinners and parties don't tell you much. So I got a job. . . .

KITTY

You don't mean—that he's Roger Cavendish, the novelist?

LAWYER

No one else.

KITTY (*swallowing hard*)

Oh, dear. . . . (*Then she smiles at him.*) You must forget all I just said, Mr. Cavendish. . . .

ELINOR (*interrupting*)

One minute, Mrs. Carson. There's no use talking like that to Mr. Cavendish—you see, he has a previous engagement.

KITTY

What nonsense!

BOGGS

But I have, Mrs. Carson. However, if you'd like me to put you in my new novel—just as you are—

KITTY

Don't you dare.

(*She flees the room.*)

MRS. PLUMMER (*to* BOGGS)

Dear Theodore—only your name isn't Theodore, is it?

ELINOR
It's Roger.

MRS. PLUMMER
Dear Roger—you didn't fool me. I knew all along you weren't a chauffeur. Didn't I say to Kitty Carson only to-day that your manners were too bad— (*She checks herself.*) I mean that you—that you— (*With sudden inspiration she turns to the lawyer.*) Don't you want to go downstairs with me and tell me all about it?

LAWYER
All about what?

MRS. PLUMMER
About everything.

LAWYER
With pleasure. (*To* BOGGS.) I'll see you again?

ELINOR
We're all having lunch together.

LAWYER
Top-hole. Madame—
(*He gives* MRS. PLUMMER *his arm and she goes out smiling, well satisfied with the world.*)
(BOGGS *and* ELINOR *stand silent.*)

BOGGS
Well, who was the cleverest, after all?

ELINOR
I was. I got you to propose.

BOGGS
I wanted to propose. I made you dance with me five times; that was the cleverest stroke of all.

ELINOR
No, the cleverest stroke was my guessing that you had kissed my hair.

BOGGS
You didn't feel me kiss it?

ELINOR
No.
(*She smiles triumphantly.*)

BOGGS
Then how did you—?

ELINOR
You looked to be the nice, sweet, mild, poetic sort of man who would do that, so I took a chance and it worked beautifully.

BOGGS
Yes, it did work beautifully, and that's really funny because—you see—I hadn't kissed your hair at all.

ELINOR (*astonished*)
You hadn't! Then why—!

BOGGS
Because I wanted to see what you were leading to! Now who's cleverest?

ELINOR
I am.

BOGGS
After what I've just said?

ELINOR
I'm still the cleverest, because while you knew when you didn't kiss me, I know when you're going to!

BOGGS
When?

ELINOR
This minute.

BOGGS
You're right.
(*He kisses her and the curtain comes down.*)

APPEARANCES

A Comedy

by Rex Taylor

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APPEARANCES

Mr. Taylor's interesting sketch "Appearances" gives four of the talented older members of the Little Theatre group an unusually good opportunity to show what they can do. The parts are almost equally balanced and each one provides a definite character study. Besides charming dignity, the author has given both Mrs. Van Courtland and the Judge a delightful sense of humor, which should prove highly satisfactory to the actors playing these rôles. Fanny and Rosenthal are broader comedy parts, but equally true to life and just as interesting to play. However, it is in Mrs. Van Courtland's and the Judge's hands to preserve the delicate charm which the author has caught in his writing.

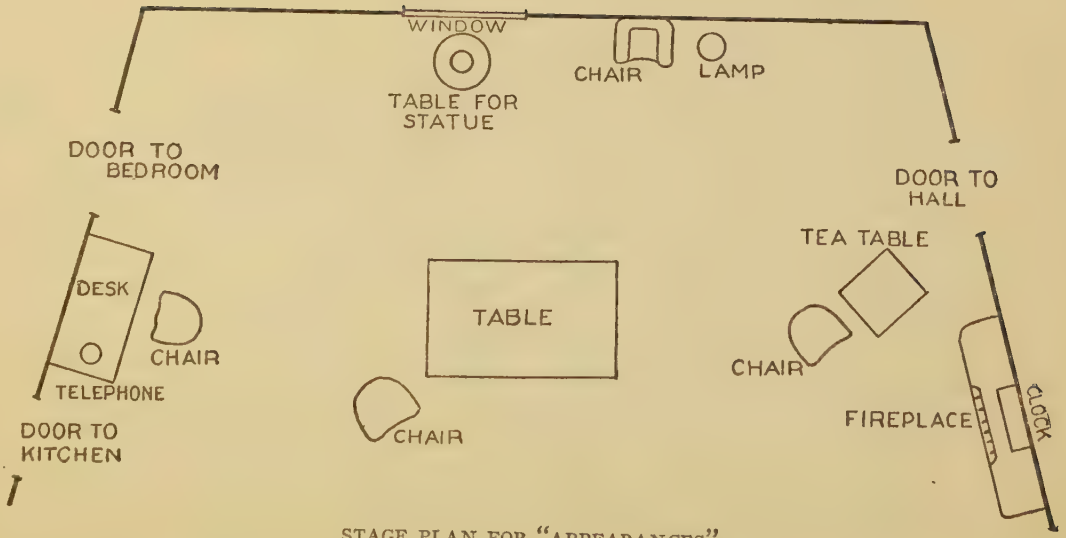
PROPERTY LIST

For Fanny
- Bills
- Basket of groceries
- Tray of corn beef and cabbage

For Mrs. Van Courtland
- Purse
- Packet of bonds

For Rosenthal
- Purse

For Judge
- Bouquet
- Letter
- Wallet
- Watch



STAGE PLAN FOR "APPEARANCES"

APPEARANCES

CHARACTERS

MARGARET VAN COURTLAND, *a "wealthy" widow*
FANNY, *maid of all work*
ROSENTHAL, *a junk man*
JUDGE FENTON, *an old family friend*

SCENE: *Interior. A living room in one of the brownstone fronts on Washington Square. Everything to show that wealth at one time predominated. It is the residence of* MRS. MARGARET VAN COURTLAND, *a widow for the past three years, during which time she has run through all her money. She is too proud to let any one know of it and has gradually sold everything of value to buy food, though still keeping the living room intact while she clings to that everlasting hope, that some day something will happen to put her on her feet again, financially.*

The living room is nicely furnished, there is a fireplace down right, a door leading off to a hall upper right, back. A window a little left on center; this looks out upon Washington Square. A door off left upper left, and below this on left is another door leading off to the dining room and kitchen.

If a balcony with four to six steps from the stage can be arranged, so the door upper left can be raised, so much the better.

TIME: *The Present.*

AT RISE: *A telephone bell starts ringing and keeps on*

until curtain is well up. FANNY *enters from door lower left, crosses to the phone which is just below the balcony.* FANNY *is the companion and housekeeper who has been in the employ of* MRS. VAN COURTLAND *for the past six years. She is eccentric in her ways, very loyal, willing and always anxious to serve her mistress. The sound of the telephone more than arouses her ire and almost knowing who the bothersome party is on the other end of the wire, she plans to tell him in as few words as possible what she thinks of him. Just before* FANNY *reaches the phone* MRS. VAN *calls out to her from the bedroom, upper left.*

MRS. VAN
Fanny?

FANNY
Yes, Mrs. Van.

MRS. VAN
Fanny, remember, I am not expected back until next month.

FANNY
Supposin' it's the Judge, Mrs. Van?

MRS. VAN
If it's the Judge, you should know better, I am always at home.
(FANNY *smiles, then the phone rings again. She frowns at it, crosses to it and takes down the receiver.*)

FANNY
Hello? (*Angry.*) Who did you want to speak to? Well, Mrs. Van Courtland is away. I can't help that, she's away, I tell you. Next week. Well, why didn't you send in your bill before she left? (FANNY *looks over bills on the table where the phone rests, finds the one the party is talking about, looks at it and while holding it looks back at*

the phone.) Well, she didn't get it. (*At this* FANNY *crumples up the bill, looks at it, then tosses it into the waste-basket at her feet.*) All right, if you will mail another bill I'll take care of it. I'll see that she— (*Places hand over mouthpiece.*) doesn't— (*Removes hand.*) get it. (FANNY *hangs up the receiver. Peeved, rises, looks up toward* MRS. VAN'S *door.*) Mrs. Van, it was the groceryman. He's callin' up almost every day, wonderin' when you're comin' back.

MRS. VAN
Fanny, it doesn't look like I'll ever be able to come back.

FANNY
Oh, yes, you will, Mrs. Van. Oh, yes, you will. (*Starts for the kitchen. Telephone bell rings. She turns, eyes it with a frown, starts rolling up her sleeves as she goes back to it.*) Hello! Who is it? Oh, the dressmaker. (MRS. VAN *has made her entrance and stands on the balcony looking down at* FANNY.) Mrs. Van hasn't returned yet from her summer home. I don't know just how long she's going to be gone. I'll tell her you called. Does she know the amount?

MRS. VAN
How could I forget it?

FANNY (*continues talking into the phone not realizing what she is saying*)
How could she forget it—I mean she's trying to forget it—

MRS. VAN
Fanny!

FANNY
Good-by! (*Very fussed. Hangs up the receiver. Looks up at* MRS. VAN.) Goodness' sakes alive, you nearly made me say somethin' that would upset things.
(MRS. VAN *comes down the steps. To* FANNY.)

MRS. VAN

Fanny, you're a gem. Without you, I would be in jail. For the past three years, you have displayed wonderful talent over the telephone. One might suspect you of being a barrister's daughter.

FANNY

I don't mind talkin' to them over the phone; it's when I have to face them at the door that worries me. (*Starts for the kitchen.*) One can't read one's expression over the phone, you know.

MRS. VAN

That's quite true, Fanny, but one can't always be away from home so much to one's creditors. The first thing we know, my creditors will form a delegation and call at my summer home.

FANNY

And they'll find out that you have sold it—what then?

MRS. VAN

That's just it. What then?

FANNY

Maybe we had better say you have gone to Europe?

MRS. VAN

That will never do, I think we covered Europe last month. I'm either motoring through the Yellowstone or somewhere up in the Canadian Rockies.

FANNY

You're such a wonderful woman, Mrs. Van, it seems a shame that all the money your late husband left you should go so quickly.

MRS. VAN

What is it they say, about a fool and his money?

FANNY
I think it is: "A fool and his money give many parties."

MRS. VAN
No, no, Fanny, it's parted, not parties.

FANNY
Anyhow, the results are the same.

MRS. VAN
My husband always said I was so extravagant that I would run through all the money in no time. If only I had it now.

FANNY
Well, every one thinks you still have it.

MRS. VAN
Yes, Fanny, appearances are everything. But don't forget, when poverty comes through the door, credit flies out the window.

FANNY
Then you mean, if you don't keep up your appearances, you can't keep up your credit?

MRS. VAN
Exactly. Without credit, I would never be able to keep up appearances.

FANNY (*scratches her head in deep thought*)
It isn't so difficult when you explain it like that.

MRS. VAN
I wonder what my friends would think if they knew the truth—if they knew that this room is all that is left of the Van Courtland mansion, as they used to call it in the Sunday supplements?

FANNY
Well, what they don't know won't hurt 'em any. But I sure hated to see you part with the library.

MRS. VAN
Yes, the dear old library. We ate it book by book.

FANNY
And the bedroom. That beautiful four-posted bed and that comfortable mattress that you always liked.

MRS. VAN
Yes. We had many a good breakfast off of that.

FANNY
How you enjoyed them shredded wheat biscuits! And there was that stature of Dante . . .

MRS. VAN
FANNY! You don't mean to tell me that you sold Dante? (FANNY *is struck dumb.* MRS. VAN *eyes her, then crosses to the pedestal, removes the cover and discovers the coffee can with the tea pot resting on it.*)

FANNY
Why not, he was the gentleman that wrote about brimstone and fire, wasn't he? Well, I got enough money off of him to buy two ton of coal.
(MRS. VAN *laughs and replaces the cover.*)

MRS. VAN
Fanny, don't ever sell another thing in this room without asking me first. Supposing I had removed that cloth when some of my friends were here?

FANNY
Mrs. Van, I didn't mean to, but you was complaining about the cold and I just couldn't see you suffer for the want of a little heat.

MRS. VAN

Well, don't let it happen again, because, if you do, I'll make it so warm around here, we won't need—

(*Back door bell rings. Both turn and look toward door. Then toward window.* FANNY *rushes to the window.*)

FANNY

It's the baker, Mrs. Van.

MRS. VAN

I'll bet he's after his dough.

FANNY

I suppose he needs it.

MRS. VAN

Now I suppose it's my turn to say, how are we going to raise it? (*The telephone bell rings. Both turn and look toward the telephone.* FANNY *starts for the telephone.*) You attend to the baker, I'll answer the phone. (FANNY *somewhat worried exits into the dining room off left.* MRS. VAN *studies the telephone for a second then with deliberation plants herself into the chair and speaks with an Irish dialect.*) Hello? Yes. Who is it you're wantin' to speak to? Mrs. Van Courtland is out. Who is this? O-o-o-o-o-h—the Judge, is it? (*Showing great surprise.*) That's different. If you'll wait just a minute, Judge, I'll be callin' Mrs. Van for you; she's always home to you, Judge. (*Rises and steps away from the phone, then leans forward so to make sure he will overhear her voice.*) Mrs. Van Courtland? The Judge wishes to speak to you on the telephone. (*Changes her dialect.*) You say the Judge wishes to talk with me on the telephone? Tell him I'll be there in just a second. (*Going to the telephone and again in Irish dialect.*) She said, she'd be here in jist a second, Judge. (*Rising quickly and standing beside phone as though speaking to* FANNY.) Fanny, will you be so kind as to tell the baker that he must wait until I finish talking

with the Judge, and then he can have his check. (*Back to Irish dialect.*) All right, Mrs. Van, I'll tell him. (MRS. VAN *then sits. Very sweet and suave tones.*) Hello, Judge. Yes, Judge. Fanny is always so careful about calling me to the phone. You see, I am bothered so much with societies wanting me to aid them financially that I just have to refuse. It's getting to be such a bore. If I gave them all I had, I don't think they would be satisfied. For tea? That's delightful. I'm so anxious to have you. Then I can count on you, Judge? Very well, shortly after three. Good-by, Dudley. (*Hangs up the receiver, and drops back into the chair.*) Fanny—Fanny—
(FANNY *hurries into the room.*)

FANNY
Yes, Mrs. Van?

MRS. VAN
Fanny, the Judge is coming for tea.

FANNY
Heavin' help us.

MRS. VAN
What's the matter, can't you serve tea and cakes?

FANNY
Sure I can, Mrs. Van, if we had any cakes, we could have tea and cakes if we had any tea.

MRS. VAN
You don't mean to tell me . . .

FANNY
That we are out of everything, not even a speck of sugar.

MRS. VAN
How about the baker, can't you get him to leave something?

FANNY
Yes, mam, he did leave something—his bill.

MRS. VAN
OH!

FANNY
But I sent him a-flyin'. He said this would be his last call —next time it will be his lawyer.

MRS. VAN
Well, for goodness' sakes, we have to have something; can't you use your brains? (FANNY *is speechless.*) Oh, yes, I have it. Get me my purse. (FANNY *gets the purse from the center table and brings it to* MRS. VAN, *who opens it and removes a few articles while* FANNY, *deeply interested, looks over her shoulder into the purse, then both look at one another when they discover the purse is empty.* MRS. VAN *hands it back to* FANNY *who replaces it.*) Well, what are we going to do? (FANNY *has returned and stands looking down at* MRS. VAN.) Don't stand there and look at me like that.

FANNY
I was only thinkin', Mrs. Van, that . . .

MRS. VAN
Don't think—do something.

FANNY
I was sayin' I was only thinkin' that we might sell something.

MRS. VAN
What a brilliant idea. I never thought of that!

FANNY
I did.

MRS. VAN
What can we spare this time?
(*Looks about.*)

FANNY
There ain't nothin' left in the room upstairs, but we might sell something in this room.

MRS. VAN
That is out of the question. If we remove one thing from this room, my friends can't help but notice it and they'll start asking questions and you know how difficult it is for me to lie.

FANNY
Yes, Mrs. Van, I know, but no one ever noticed that the stature was gone, neither did you. Maybe we can cover up something else. (MRS. VAN *brightens up, gives the room the once over and finally catches* FANNY *looking up at a picture.*) How 'bout selling that?

MRS. VAN
I wouldn't dare do that, that was my husband's favorite sister. We've got to think of something else. (*Both turn their backs on the clock to look off right when the clock strikes three, both turn.* That's it. (*Eyeing the clock.*) The clock has tolled it's knell. There is always an alibi for a clock.

FANNY
How's that?

MRS. VAN
It will be missed, of course. But we can say it needed repairing. Now we must telephone for some one to come and buy it. (FANNY, *all enthused rushes to the phone book.*) What are you looking for?

FANNY
A junk dealer.

MRS. VAN
Junk! Fanny, that is not junk. That clock has been in my family for years! I have always loved that clock, and my husband knew it. (*Pauses for a second as she looks back at the clock.*) Fanny, what do you think we can get for it?

FANNY
We should get two hundred dollars.

MRS. VAN
Hurry up and find a junk dealer.

FANNY (*diving into the book*)
I'm tryin' to. Let's see, here is Marovitz.
(*Turns leaves and reads.*)

MRS. VAN
He sounds Russian. He won't do. I can't stand men with black whiskers.

FANNY
Goldberg?

MRS. VAN
GOLD—Goldberg—he'll do. Anybody with gold attached to his name will answer.

FANNY
But *he* lives in Hoboken.

MRS. VAN
Oh, pshaw. Try and find some one nearby.

FANNY
Eisenstein, Eltfelt, Friedman, Fleischner, Goldstone, Horovitz, Isaacs, Jacobstein, Jacoby, Krauss, Lowenstein, Levy, Leventhal, Hehr—

MRS. VAN
Fanny! Fanny! Stop it, stop it! If any one should overhear you, they might think you were calling the roll for St. Peter.

FANNY
Ah, I have it. Michael Monahan, dealer in second-hand articles.
(MRS. VAN *leans forward to get a good look at the book.*)

MRS. VAN
Are you sure that isn't a misprint?

FANNY
Can you beat it! I'll call the number and find out.
(*Takes down the receiver while* MRS. VAN *crosses to the clock.*)

MRS. VAN
Fanny, be sure and tell the gentleman to hurry.

FANNY
Yes, Mrs. Van. Hello, hello? Central, central, give me . . .

ROSENTHAL (*off*)
Rags, bottles, old clothes, old furniture . . .

MRS. VAN
Fanny, speak of the devil—

FANNY (*looking out of the window*)
—and he sure looks like him. Here, you! wait a minute! Right around to the door. (MRS. VAN *crosses down as* FANNY *turns from window and exits into the hall.* FANNY *speaks off stage.*) Right this way, and don't trip over that rug.
(FANNY *and* ROSENTHAL *enter.*)

ROSENTHAL
Vot a foin place you hev. (*Sees* MRS. VAN.) Howdy do, lady.

MRS. VAN
Do you buy furniture and bric-à-brac?

ROSENTHAL
Sure, anytink.

MRS. VAN
Will you have a chair?

ROSENTHAL
No, tanks, ve got plendy chairs in our store.

MRS. VAN
I meant to say, will you be seated?

ROSENTHAL
If et is all de same to you, lady, I might look around.
(ROSENTHAL *turns and looks up stage, allowing* MRS. VAN *and* FANNY *to get together.* MRS. VAN *telling* FANNY *in action to speak to the man about the clock.*)

FANNY
There ain't nothin' in this room that you can buy, exceptin' that clock over there.
(ROSENTHAL *turns, looks at the clock then crosses to it, is followed by* MRS. VAN *and* FANNY, *who watch him closely.*)

ROSENTHAL
I got no time for a clock.

FANNY
Ain't you the comic!

ROSENTHAL
Dot's a nice rug. How much do you vant for it?

MRS. VAN
Oh, I couldn't part with that. (MRS. VAN *turns toward the clock.*) Mister, please concentrate on this. It is really a fine old clock.

ROSENTHAL
I know dot, lady, but I couldn't sell me a clock to my customers. If it was a alarm clock—maybe I buy it for myself.

MRS. VAN
But this clock has the loveliest chimes—listen. (MRS. VAN *moves the hands to four. The clock chimes four.*) And they chime every quarter hour.

ROSENTHAL
Every fifteen minutes, dot rings all night? Ven do I sleep?

MRS. VAN
Of course you can turn the chimes off until you get used to them.

ROSENTHAL
Vell, maybe—how much do you vant for it?

MRS. VAN
How much will you give?

ROSENTHAL
How much do you *vant?*

MRS. VAN
Two hundred dollars.

ROSENTHAL
Oie, oie! Gevalt! How much will you *take?*

MRS. VAN
Fifty.

ROSENTHAL
Listen, lady, I ain't got no use for the clock, you got somethink else maybe you will sell.

MRS. VAN
There is nothing else I can part with, other than this clock.

ROSENTHAL
Vell, I come beck some day again, sometime—good-by.
(ROSENTHAL *starts for the door.* MRS. VAN *is lost for words,* FANNY *is growing worried, when* MRS. VAN *who reaches out for the man finally finds words.*)

MRS. VAN
Mr. man, just a minute. (ROSENTHAL *turns at the door.*)
What will *you* give for the clock?

ROSENTHAL
Lady, I got no use for such a big clock.

MRS. VAN
But won't you make me an offer?

ROSENTHAL (*crossing back to the clock, takes out his purse.* MRS. VAN *and* FANNY *standing near by gaze at it longingly.* FANNY *and* MRS. VAN *look at one another then back at the money.*)
I'll give you twenty-fife dollars.
(*Holds out the money.* MRS. VAN *is about to take it when* FANNY *tugs at her dress.* MRS. VAN *knocks her hand away and then becomes defiant.*)

MRS. VAN
I couldn't think of it. (ROSENTHAL *is about to place the money back in his purse.*) Give me thirty dollars?

ROSENTHAL
Twenty-fife dollars—and I take the clock.

MRS. VAN
Thirty?

ROSENTHAL
Twenty-fife.

MRS. VAN
Twenty-nine?

ROSENTHAL
Twenty-fife.

MRS. VAN
Twenty-eight?

ROSENTHAL
Twenty-fife.

MRS. VAN
Twenty-seven?

ROSENTHAL
Twenty-fife.

MRS. VAN
Twenty-six?

ROSENTHAL
Twenty-fife.

MRS. VAN
Can't you say anything but twenty-five dollars?

ROSENTHAL
I could say twenty—but I ain't so cheap!
(ROSENTHAL *hands it out.* MRS. VAN *looks at it.* ROSENTHAL *is about to put it into the purse when* MRS. VAN *grabs it.* ROSENTHAL *pulls down his hat, lifts the clock and starts up stage.*)

MRS. VAN
Sold! For twenty-five dollars!

ROSENTHAL
Lady, maybe I should not buy such a clock, my boss he might fire me?

FANNY
Go on with you, you know you got a bargain.

MRS. VAN (*in undertone*)
Fanny, don't excite the gentleman, he might change his mind.
(FANNY *crosses to* MRS. VAN, *eyeing the man over her shoulder as he exits.*)

FANNY
Twenty-five dollars. That will buy a lot of groceries.

MRS. VAN
What do we need?

FANNY
Everything.

MRS. VAN
Will twenty-five dollars buy that much?

FANNY
It will buy what we need, and some extras besides. I don't think you've had a square meal since we sold the icebox.

MRS. VAN
You're right, Fanny. I can't quite remember when we had our last square meal. (*Business with belt.*) I took in two inches this morning.

FANNY
To-night you'll be lettin' it out again.

MRS. VAN
Let's see, we'll want some nice chicken, some potted tongue, a leg of lamb for next Sunday, about a dozen tins of Russian caviar, some of that imported English marmalade, and— (*She feels the belt again.*) have the butcher throw in some corned beef and cabbage.

FANNY
Mrs. Van, the Judge . . .

MRS. VAN
That's all right, don't worry about the Judge. After the *Judge* and *I* have tea, *you* and *I* will EAT.

FANNY
Mrs. Van—I—I don't want to be presumin', but why don't you marry the Judge? (MRS. VAN *draws up and eyes* FANNY.) I know you like him, Mrs. Van, and he's got plenty of money.

MRS. VAN
FANNY!

FANNY
It would put an end to all your troubles.

MRS. VAN
That's it exactly. You have answered your own question.

FANNY
Maybe I have, but I don't see . . .

MRS. VAN
Well, Fanny, I think you are entitled to an explanation. I really am very fond of the Judge.

FANNY
I've noticed that.

MRS. VAN
In the first place, I think altogether too much of him to

marry him for his money. In the second place, if I *did* marry him, I would always feel that I had been influenced by these conditions. In the third place, the appearances. Supposing it should leak out that I married him when I was—er—financially embarrassed. In the fourth place, he hasn't asked me in the first place.
(FANNY *is bewildered.*)

FANNY
I think he will.

MRS. VAN
You had better think about the groceries. (*She hands* FANNY *the money.*) It is almost time for the Judge. (*They both turn and look toward the spot where the clock last stood. They realize it has gone, look at one another, smile as they shrug their shoulders.*) Remember, Fanny, the way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

FANNY
Yes, and there's many a good cook that never got any further than the stomach.
(FANNY *exits L.* MRS. VAN *watches her, then turns toward the spot where the clock last stood, sees the bareness, then looks down at a chair beside her—lifts it and places it where the clock stood, steps back to see if it will be noticed. The door bell rings.* MRS. VAN *looks frightened, calls to* FANNY *off left. Realizing she has gone, she rushes to the window and looks out. While* MRS. VAN *is looking out, the* JUDGE *makes his entrance. He is carrying a small bouquet; he has left his coat and hat in the hall.* MRS. VAN *turns as if the person might have gone and when she discovers the* JUDGE *standing in the room she is quite flustered.*)

MRS. VAN
Oh, Judge! I thought you were a collector.

JUDGE
Collector?
(MRS. VAN *is very fussed at her last remark.*)

MRS. VAN
Yes, Dudley, I meant to say, that an art collector has been pestering me with one of his paintings, such a bore these collectors.

JUDGE
Margaret, you'll pardon me coming in unannounced, but I found the door ajar and took the liberty.

MRS. VAN
You did more than that; you took me by surprise.

JUDGE (*hands over the bouquet to* MRS. VAN)
Only that I *could* take you—by surprise.

MRS. VAN (*burying her face into the bouquet and looking over it at the* JUDGE *with a twinkle in her eyes.*)
Now, Dudley.

JUDGE
You know, Margaret, I have always wanted to . . .

MRS. VAN
—say it with flowers. You're so thoughtful, Dudley. I wasn't expecting you quite so soon.
(MRS. VAN *turns and places the bouquet in a near-by vase. The* JUDGE *is somewhat disappointed; he feels for something to say.*)

JUDGE
Perhaps I am a bit early. (*Removes his watch, studies it.*) This old timepiece of mine must have— (*Places it to his ear and listens.*) Ah, yes, it's going.

MRS. VAN
Mine's gone.

JUDGE
What? (*Looks and discovers the clock gone.*) Why, so it has! Where has it gone?

MRS. VAN
Why, I sold it to a Jew—I mean—I sent it to the Jew—the jewelers.

JUDGE
Something wrong with it?

MRS. VAN
Yes, you see I was broke, I mean to say *it* was broken, *broken.*

JUDGE
What seemed to be the trouble with it?

MRS. VAN
There was something the matter with its—its—its face. Neuralgia, I think.

JUDGE (*has a good laugh*)
Margaret, you're *so* clever.

MRS. VAN (*feeling as though she has gotten out of a serious predicament, she turns to the couch.*)
Shall we sit?

JUDGE (*he allows* MRS. VAN *to sit first, then gets himself comfortably seated, and looks* MRS. VAN *over admiringly and thoroughly.*)
Do you know, I think you are taking off a little weight.

MRS. VAN
Dudley, you flatter me.

JUDGE
Have you been dieting?

MRS. VAN
For some time. Do you know, I can't help thinking about those poor starving Russians. I know just how they feel.

JUDGE
Speaking of Russians, reminds me of a trip I made into the lower East Side yesterday, to inspect some property in the tenement district. The sights I saw! Would you believe it, in one place I found an entire family living in *just one room!*
(MRS. VAN *catches herself, eyes the* JUDGE, *then looks the room over.*)

MRS. VAN
Awful. I don't see how *they* can do it.

JUDGE
Of course you don't. How could you—you surrounded here by wealth.

MRS. VAN
Yes. There are many wealthy families living in this neighborhood.
(JUDGE *laughs.* MRS. VAN *forces her laugh as though to make him think she has pulled a good joke, at the same time meaning it.*)

JUDGE
Speaking of wealth, reminds me. Did you hear about the Pangborns?

MRS. VAN (*moving over toward the* JUDGE)
J just knew you'd have some scandal to tell me.

JUDGE
Nothing very scandalous, except the Pangborns lost every penny they had in that Consolidated flurry last month.

MRS. VAN
Consolidated?

JUDGE
Yes, Consolidated went smash—ruined thousands.

MRS. VAN
How dreadful! That's odd, though. I saw the Pangborns in a brand new town-car only yesterday.

JUDGE
That is the scandalous part of it. They haven't a penny, and they are trying to keep up appearances. I was informed that they owe large bills in every store in town, and it seems they are getting away with it.

MRS. VAN
I don't see how *they* can do it.

JUDGE
How I despise these people who think of nothing but keeping up appearances!

MRS. VAN (*rather abstracted*)
It's awfully difficult.

JUDGE
What is?

MRS. VAN (*trying to cover*)
To keep from despising them.

JUDGE
There is one thing about you, Margaret, that I have always admired.

MRS. VAN
Yes, Dudley?

JUDGE
That is, that you are just plain Mrs. Van Courtland, without any frills or airs, living quietly and getting every bit of enjoyment out of the money your husband left you.

MRS. VAN
You will insist upon flattery.

JUDGE
Margaret, there has been something on my mind for a long time, and I know you feel the same way about it that I do.

MRS. VAN
Dudley, you're hungry?

JUDGE
Nothing of the sort. I'm in love.

MRS. VAN
DUDLEY!

JUDGE
Do you know, you could make me the happiest man in the world.

MRS. VAN
And I can freely say that the dearest wish of my heart is—
(FANNY *bursts into the room carrying a basket of groceries.*)

FANNY
Food, Mrs. Van, food!

MRS. VAN
Fanny!

FANNY
I wanted to say, Mrs. Van, that I had to spend the whole twenty-five—

MRS. VAN
You shouldn't have done that. I said you were only to spend fifteen *minutes*—and here you have spent the whole twenty-five. How careless of you, how careless of you!

FANNY

I'm sorry, Mrs. Van, if you and the Judge will pardon me, I'll be preparin' the tea for you.

(FANNY *backs off toward the kitchen door,* MRS. VAN *looks over her shoulder at* FANNY, *winks her eye.* FANNY *smiles and exits.* MRS. VAN *then turns on the* JUDGE.)

MRS. VAN

Judge, you were about to say something, when Fanny interrupted us.

JUDGE

I've quite forgotten. You see she startled me so. (JUDGE *tries to think.* MRS. VAN *is trying to help him, then he brightens up, so does* MRS. VAN.) Oh, yes, I remember now. It was about a letter.

MRS. VAN

A letter!

JUDGE

Yes, a letter your late husband left in my care a few weeks before he died. (*The* JUDGE *brings forth a letter from his inside coat pocket.*) It's for you. (MRS VAN *takes the letter, looks at it, and studies it, while the* JUDGE *rises and looks down at her.*) Now, while you read it, I will step into the hall and get a cigar from my overcoat pocket. (*The* JUDGE *exits while* MRS. VAN, *who has risen to her feet, watches him off, then turns to the letter almost afraid to open it. Turning it over two or three times, she finally tears it open. Reads it and each line brings a look of sorrow, regret, and disappointment. Tears come to her eyes. Finishing the letter she looks toward the hall door, sees that the* JUDGE *is nowhere in sight, she then goes to the door on left and calls softly to* FANNY.)

MRS. VAN

Fanny, come here.

FANNY (FANNY *enters and notes that* MRS. VAN *is upset.*) Why, what's the matter? You're cryin'. Has the Judge and you quarreled already?

MRS. VAN

Don't be silly, Fanny! I want you to hear this letter. It was left by my husband. Fanny, you have shared all my troubles and I want you to hear what he has written here. (FANNY *watches her intently, a tear coming to her eyes as she listens.*) My dear wife:—This letter will reach you three years after I have passed on. Knowing you as I do —your generous nature, and your habits of extravagance, I feel certain that you will, by this time, have completely disposed of the last dollar of the money I was able to leave you.

FANNY

How well he knew you!

MRS. VAN (*continues reading letter*)

I can't bear to think of you as being in want of the necessities of life and so I am preparing for the contingency in advance. I have set aside $50,000, not mentioned in my will, and this letter, which I am entrusting to my old friend, Judge Fenton, will place at your disposal the above amount. I trust that by now you have learned your lesson, and I will be able to rest, secure in the knowledge that your welfare and comfort is provided for through the remaining years of your life. Your devoted husband, Charles. (MRS. VAN *wipes her eyes,* FANNY *sniffles and looks at the same time for the fifty thousand dollars, hoping it might be in the letter.* MRS. VAN *realizes what she is trying to do and shakes the letter, both looking down to see if the money has fallen to the floor.* FANNY *is the first to look up, and discovers that there is another sheet attached to the letter.* MRS. VAN *brings the second sheet to the top and shows a look of surprise as she continues to read.*) P.S. After further consideration, I have con-

verted the $50,000 into gilt-edge securities and have concealed them in a small compartment in the back of the old —FAMILY—CLOCK. (MRS. VAN *and* FANNY *slowly bring up the tear-dropped eyes and look off into space, both realizing what they have done. Both turn and look for the clock, then* MRS. VAN *screams.*) FANNY! FANNY! We *must* find that junk man. Find him, if you have to spend all day Saturday in the Synagogue.
(FANNY *rushes through the door off left.* MRS. VAN *calls to her off left.*)

MRS. VAN
And don't come back till you find that clock. (*The* JUDGE *enters smoking a cigar. He coughs,* MRS. VAN *turns.*) Judge, will you pardon me just a moment, I must see to the tea.

JUDGE
Go ahead; don't bother about me.

MRS. VAN
Dudley, you're perfectly wonderful.
(MRS. VAN *exits hurriedly off left. The* JUDGE *looks after her, smiles, throws out his chest, walks up stage, looks out the window, turns and notices the covered pedestal, studies it for a second, goes to it, lifts the cover. The tea pot and coffee can fall to floor. He picks them up and looks at them in astonishment, then carefully replaces them. He then places hand to his chin and looks off in the direction of the clock, comes down stage still looking at spot where the clock stood, back to the pedestal then to front with a knowing look. At this point,* ROSENTHAL *enters.*)

ROSENTHAL
Say, mister. (*The* JUDGE *turns.*) Are you de lady's husband what sold me a clock?

JUDGE
That remains to be seen.

ROSENTHAL
Vell, I got to come back to tell you dot my boss said if I don' take the clock back and get me de money, I am fired.

JUDGE
Oh, I see, you *bought* the clock from the lady.

ROSENTHAL
Yes, sir, she said she needed the money, so I helps her out and buys from her de clock.

JUDGE
How much did you give her for the clock?

ROSENTHAL (*looks about room*)
Fifty dollars.

JUDGE
Is that all you gave her?
(*The* JUDGE *looks toward the door,* ROSENTHAL *kicks himself for not saying more.*)

ROSENTHAL
My gracious, ain't dot a much?

JUDGE
Why, you should be arrested for making such a bargain. Have you the clock with you?

ROSENTHAL
It's outside in my wagon.

JUDGE
Get it at once and bring it in here; I'll give you back your money.

ROSENTHAL
Mister, you're a gentlemens.
(ROSENTHAL *exits through door upper right. The* JUDGE

turns to the door leading off left, listens and cautiously looks to see where MRS. VAN *is, then steps back, takes out his wallet and extracts five pieces of currency, just as* ROSENTHAL *enters, the* JUDGE *points to the spot, at the same time moving the chair back to its former place.*)

JUDGE
Now get out of here, before I throw you out.
(*Hands him the money.* ROSENTHAL *exits through door upper right. He has no sooner gone than* MRS. VAN *enters, the* JUDGE *has his back turned as he has been watching the Jew off. He hears* MRS. VAN *and turns.*)

MRS. VAN
You'll have to wait a few minutes for tea, Judge, as I had to send Fanny out for something.

JUDGE (*goes to her, and puts arm around her*)
As I was trying to tell you, you can make me the happiest man in the world.

MRS. VAN
Why, Dudley, what has come over you?

JUDGE
Margaret, will you be my wife?

MRS. VAN
Do you really love me?

JUDGE
Love you? Of course I love you. Why, I have grown to love you more and more every day.

MRS. VAN
You're quite sure?

JUDGE
Quite sure.

MRS. VAN
It's not my money you're after.
(MRS. VAN *turns away to conceal a smile. The* JUDGE *at the same time looks first at the pedestal then at the clock, then back at* MRS. VAN.)

JUDGE
Margaret, you know better than that. It's you, just you, that I love and I want you to give me your answer this minute.

MRS. VAN
Oh, Dudley, you must let me think it over—at least give me a minute and a half.

JUDGE
Very well, my dear, a minute and a half.
(*The* JUDGE *takes out his watch and studies it.* MRS. VAN, *somewhat embarrassed, stands facing the* JUDGE *as she bites her lower lip, she is merely stalling. There is a pause of a few seconds, then the clock chimes the quarter hour.* MRS. VAN *slowly looks up, bewildered at the sound of the clock, and on the fourth chime she faces the clock with a look of surprise.*)

MRS. VAN
Judge, how did that clock get back there?

JUDGE
Why, the Jew—the jeweler was here; he says it is keeping excellent time now.

MRS. VAN (*eyes the* JUDGE)
Did you pay the man for the clock?

JUDGE
Yes.

MRS. VAN
Then you know . . .

JUDGE
Yes. (*Looks down at his watch.*) You have just ten seconds to answer my question.

MRS. VAN
My answer is—NO!

JUDGE
Margaret, you don't understand.

MRS. VAN
Yes, I do understand, you would marry me out of sympathy, but I don't need your sympathy, I am quite able to take care of myself.

JUDGE
You can't go on living this life of delusion, and hollow mockery.

MRS. VAN
I can't? Can't I—well, I'll show you.
(*The* JUDGE *watches her closely.* MRS. VAN *rushes down stage to the clock, opens the front and reaches inside. She paws frantically about inside. She trips a spring and the clock works shower about her. She falls back.* FANNY *rushes in, towing* ROSENTHAL *from the hallway. He is protesting.*)

FANNY
I've got him, Mrs. Van, I've got him.
(MRS. VAN *fishes around inside the clock.*)

ROSENTHAL
Vy don't you let me explain?

MRS. VAN
Fanny, Fanny! I've got it—I've got it—(*Brings out a packet of bonds.*)—fifty thousand dollars. It was in this clock all the time and we never knew it.

ROSENTHAL
Oie, oie, I'm sick.
(*He exits out door through hall and off.*)

MRS. VAN
Judge Fenton, you wanted to marry me out of sympathy. I'd much rather you married me for my money.

JUDGE
Margaret.

MRS. VAN
And I'm going to let you take care of it for me. (*She hands the securities to the* JUDGE. *Both she and* FANNY *are hysterical, they embrace. The* JUDGE *studies the stocks, shows great surprise. Thinks he is speaking to* MRS. VAN.) More Consolidated! Worthless!

MRS. VAN
Fanny, you may serve tea. What did you say about the stock, Dudley?

JUDGE
I said—it is *price*-less. I'll see that you don't run through this in a hurry. (*Stows it in pocket. Turns to* MRS. VAN *—they look at each other, lots of sentiment.*) Margaret, it's wonderful to think that at last you are going to be mine. We'll be so happy.
(*Holds out his hands.*)

MRS. VAN (*takes his hands—smiles.* FANNY *enters with tray of steaming corned beef and cabbage.*)
Yes, Dudley, I think we're going to— (*She is going to say, "be happy," but she smells the food, half turns, then back to the* JUDGE.) I think we're going to— (*Gets another whiff.*) I *know* we're going to eat!
(*She drops* JUDGE'S *hands and follows* FANNY *as she exits passage.* JUDGE *looks amazed, starts to follow after.*)

CURTAIN

'TWAS EVER THUS

A Farce

by Ida Lublenski Ehrlich

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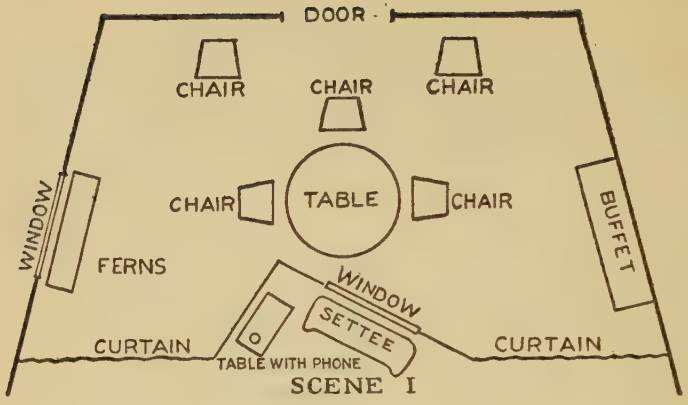
'TWAS EVER THUS

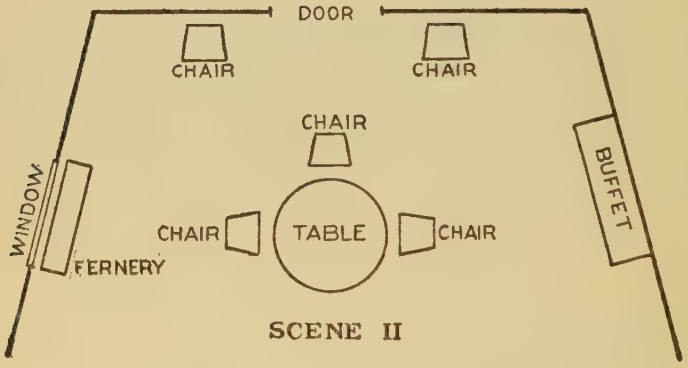
There is but one difficulty to be overcome in staging Mrs. Ehrlich's very entertaining farce, and that is the change of setting. Since the major portion of the play takes place in the second scene, the Halsons' dining room, this setting should occupy the full stage. The first scene must be very shallow. It may be played before drapes with only the furniture, the telephone stand, the telephone and two chairs or small settee, suggesting the room. A tall screen set in back of the furniture would help. Or if you wish to be more elaborate and realistic you might construct a triangular setting about eight feet wide and five feet deep at the apex, with a window on one side. Draw your curtains to the edge of this and by careful lighting it will be very effective and can be quickly removed.

Mrs. Ehrlich's dialogue is so natural that the actors should be warned that it is the hardest kind to memorize. They should begin memorizing very early in rehearsal, so that by the time of the performance the lines will flow as easily and spontaneously as the author has written them. Remember, too, farce tempo is the goal.

PROPERTY LIST

For Agnes
Engagement ring





STAGE PLANS FOR "'TWAS EVER THUS"

'TWAS EVER THUS

CHARACTERS

AGNES
FREDERICK, *her fiancé*
LOUISE, *her sister*
RICHARD, *her brother-in-law*

SCENE I: At Agnes'
SCENE II: At Louise', a week later.

SCENE I

As the curtain rises AGNES *is discovered walking excitedly up and down the room. She wrings her hands and wipes the tears from her face. She goes to telephone.*

AGNES
Give me Plaza 3699—yes—(*To herself, while waiting for the number.*) Oh, dear! Oh, dear! (*Into telephone.*) Yes—this is Miss Flemming—yes—has Mrs. Halson returned? No?—Has Mr. Halson returned? No?—yes—will you please—yes—yes—(*Hangs up receiver with a moan.*) Oh, dear me!
(FREDERICK *enters.*)

FRED (*cheerily*)
Hello, sweetheart.

AGNES (*bursts into tears*)
Oh, Fred!

FRED (*alarmed*)
What's the matter?

AGNES (*sobbing inarticulately on his breast*)
Something awful has happened!

FRED
What is it? Tell me . . .

AGNES
Louise—(*Chokes.*)

FRED (*anxiously*)
What's the matter with Louise?

AGNES (*as before*)
Richard—

FRED
Richard, too? Dearest, tell me at once . . .

AGNES (*with a fresh outburst*)
They've quarreled!

FRED (*immensely relieved*)
Is that all? Whew! I thought God knows what calamity . . .

AGNES
It is a calamity. They're going to be separated.

FRED (*aghast*)
No!

AGNES
Yes. It must be something terrible. Louise came here this morning—she cried her eyes out.

FRED
What about?

AGNES
I couldn't get anything out of her except that she's through with married life.

FRED
What does Richard say? Did you see him?

AGNES
He says the same thing.

FRED
They agree.

AGNES
It was horrible—you should have heard them.

FRED
A noisy agreement, eh?

AGNES (*reproachfully*)
How can you jest about it?

FRED
Well, really, dearest, it isn't so terrible. Louise and Richard have quarreled before.

AGNES
But not like this. This is the end.

FRED
Come—come—don't take it so seriously. They'll make it up exactly like the other times.

AGNES
You don't understand, Fred. Louise is heartbroken. Her whole life is ruined—her happiness destroyed. And she has only been married a year.

FRED
She's hysterical and you're exaggerating.

AGNES
Indeed I'm not. You should have seen Richard. He was positively wild. I couldn't get a calm word from either of them. What a dreadful picture!

FRED
Picture? What picture?

AGNES
What a horrible picture of married life. I tell you it is a lesson for me. A warning.

FRED
A warning for what?

AGNES
Fred, if that's marriage, I'll have nothing to do with it. (*She twists her engagement ring from her finger.*) Here is your ring. I will not get married.

FRED (*aghast*)
Agnes! For heaven's sake, what are you talking about?

AGNES
I don't want to get married. We'll be unhappy, too.

FRED
What nonsense!

AGNES
It isn't nonsense. . . .

FRED
But you've heard of people quarreling before?

AGNES
I know, but I didn't worry about it. I've even heard of people separating. But I thought they must be people who did not love each other—people who didn't go into marriage with the right idea. But that Louise and Richard

should come to such a pass—that is a monstrous thing! It proves that marriage is a failure.

FRED (*trying to get a word in*)
But, dearie—

AGNES (*ignoring his interruption*)
Because I know how they loved each other. I know how Louise felt about marriage—about her duty to Richard. Why, her idea of marriage was a poem—a SYMPHONY!

FRED
But even symphonies have discords occasionally.

AGNES
You're treating this lightly, Fred. I tell you she put every bit of her splendid nature and ability into her marriage to make it ideally beautiful. So did Richard. And now look at them— (*She bursts out crying*) They can't endure living together another day.

FRED
But what has all this to do with us?

AGNES
Everything! Marriage is a failure. I won't have anything to do with it.

FRED
You're talking like a baby.

AGNES
I'm sorry it seems so to you. But with such a horrible example before me it would be like walking into a pit with my eyes open. What's the use of storing up misery for ourselves.

FRED
But the same thing doesn't have to happen to us.

AGNES
If it happened to Louise, it can happen to me also. I cannot hope to do more than she did.

FRED (*trying to put the ring on her finger again*)
Listen to reason, darling . .

AGNES
I cannot think of marriage with Louise's misery before me. What can I hope for when I see her beautiful dreams dashed to the ground?

FRED
I tell you they'll make it up again—I'll bet anything they will. (*With sudden inspiration.*) If they do, will you take the ring back? If I bring them together again, will you marry me?

AGNES (*eagerly*)
Oh, Fred! Do you think you could?

FRED (*confidently*)
I'm sure of it. Well, is it a bargain?

AGNES
Yes, if you reconcile them.

FRED (*puts ring into his pocket*)
All right. You'll have this back in a few days, my love.

AGNES
I wish I could feel so hopeful. Are you sure?

FRED
Do you imagine I would put this ring away so soon if I weren't? It's only because I feel sure that you'll wear it again in a day or two that I'm letting you off so easily.

AGNES
Well, good-by, I wish you luck.

FRED
Can't I kiss you?

AGNES
No. Better not.

FRED (*frowns*)
Don't be so severe.

AGNES
I'm serious.

FRED
Then I'll be serious, too. Farewell until our next engagement.
(*He blows her a kiss and goes out.* AGNES *looks after him with a doubtful smile.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The dining room at the HALSON'S *one week later.*

FRED *sits at the table facing the audience.* LOUISE *is at his right,* RICHARD *at his left.* LOUISE *and* RICHARD *sit facing each other, but each is turned slightly forward so as to avoid looking at each other. They both sit stiffly in their chairs.* FRED'S *face wears a forced, weary smile. They are finishing dinner.*

FRED (*making a brave attempt to keep up the conversation in spite of the discouraging silence. To* LOUISE)
Don't you think that was an interesting experience?

LOUISE (*dully*)
Mm.

FRED (*to* RICHARD)
Don't you, eh, old boy?

RICHARD (*absently*)
Hm.

FRED (*shakes his head in despair—takes out the ring and looks at it for inspiration. Puts it back after a minute and begins with renewed enthusiasm*)
I tell you, when I saw it before my very eyes—it made my hair stand on end. A man lowered by a rope over that awful chasm— (*To* LOUISE.) Can you imagine it?

LOUISE (*looking dejectedly into her coffee cup*)
I beg your pardon. What did you say?

FRED (*groans*)
Oh, Lord!

RICHARD
Eh, what?

FRED
It doesn't matter.

RICHARD
Say—why can't you say something interesting for a change?

FRED
The only thing that you would really find interesting would be to talk about a reconciliation, and that you will not let me talk about.
(RICHARD *throws an expectant glance at* LOUISE.)

LOUISE (*stiffly*)
Of course not!

RICHARD (*seeing that she is obdurate*)
I should say not.

FRED
But my dear friends, if you would only—
(LOUISE *throws him a hopeful glance.*)

RICHARD (*angrily*)
Oh, shut up!

LOUISE (*stiffly again*)
There is no use talking about that . . . (*She stops, hoping that* RICHARD *will interrupt and contradict her. As he is silent she adds decidedly.*)—any more. That's settled.

RICHARD (*emphatically*)
That's settled.

FRED
But I'm absolutely certain, if we talked the matter over quietly we could come to an understanding.

LOUISE
What good will that do, pray?

FRED (*to* RICHARD)
If you will only admit . . .

RICHARD (*bringing his fist down on the table so that the china rattles*)
I'll be damned if I admit anything!

LOUISE (*with angry sarcasm*)
Spoken like a gentleman.

RICHARD (*ready to apologize*)
I didn't mean . . .

FRED
The whole matter hangs on a trifle . . .

LOUISE (*turning on him indignantly*)
A trifle—indeed!

FRED (*ready to bite his tongue off*)
Excuse me, I didn't mean a trifle. It was an unfortunate word.

LOUISE
I should say it was unfortunate.

RICHARD
What's the use of all this talk? If Louise insists . . .

LOUISE
Of course I insist. Do you imagine for a moment that I will permit you . . .

RICHARD
I didn't say . . .

LOUISE
You did!

RICHARD
I did not!

LOUISE
Call me a liar, why don't you?

FRED (*imploring*)
Louise, please . . .

LOUISE (*glaring at* RICHARD)
Well, why don't you?

FRED (*to* RICHARD)
Please . . .

RICHARD (*ignoring him*)
I didn't say any such thing. I won't stand your . . .

LOUISE
You won't stand it? You mean *I* won't stand it.

FRED (*trying to make himself heard above the din*)
For heaven's sake, let me get a word in . . .

LOUISE
Listen to you, indeed! When you call my ruined life a trifle.

FRED (*abjectly*)
I apologized for that unfortunate word.

LOUISE (*still bristling*)
Trifle!

FRED
But we must all make allowances. (*To* LOUISE.) Be reasonable.

LOUISE
I *am* reasonable. (*Bursting out.*) I've had enough of you. First you call the whole thing a trifle, then you call me unreasonable.

FRED
I didn't say you were unreasonable. I only meant . .

LOUISE
My whole life gone to pieces and you—you—I won't stay here a moment longer. (*She bursts into tears and flounces out of the room.* FRED *looks after her helplessly.*)

RICHARD (*turning on him*)
Now what did you do to her?

FRED
I?

RICHARD
What did you make her cry for?

FRED
I made her cry?

RICHARD
What right have you to call her unreasonable?

FRED (*after staring at him for a voiceless minute*)
Well, I give up. (RICHARD *half rises as though to follow* LOUISE. *He restrains himself, lights a cigar and begins to puff furiously. After a minute he gets glum and lets it go out. He sits dejectedly, cigar hanging loosely between his lips, his hands thrust into his pockets.* FRED *regards him with a smile which is a mixture of pity, disgust, sarcasm and amusement.*) Don't like to see the old girl cry?

RICHARD (*belligerently*)
Suppose I don't, what then?

FRED (*sweetly*)
Oh, nothing. You love her dearly, don't you?

RICHARD
And suppose I do. What's that to you?

FRED
Oh, nothing. (*Pause.* RICHARD *begins to chew at his cigar.*) I say, Richard, why don't you tell her so?

RICHARD (*limply, all the fight gone out of him*)
Oh, what's the use. She doesn't love me any more.

FRED
She does, as much as ever.

RICHARD (*eagerly*)
Do you think so?

FRED (*lying*)
She told me so.

RICHARD (*joyfully*)
She did? But why doesn't she tell me?

FRED
She thinks you don't love her any more.

RICHARD
But I do—I do—if she leaves me I'll kill myself.

FRED
Then tell her so.

RICHARD
I've been trying to tell her all week, but every time I open my mouth she begins to shout and I lose my temper.

FRED
Shout louder. Say "I LOVE YOU" above the din and see what happens.

RICHARD
You're making fun of me.

FRED
No, I'm not. It's the only way. Tell her you love her and settle the whole thing before it is too late. She's coming now.
(LOUISE *enters dressed for the street.*)

LOUISE
Good-by, Fred.

FRED
Don't go, Louise.

LOUISE
Oh, yes, I am. (*She does not move.*) I'm sorry I lost my temper.

FRED
Never mind that. But don't go.
(*He nods encouragingly to* RICHARD.)

LOUISE (*tragically*)
I must. This is my home no longer.
(*She makes a half-hearted movement toward the door.*)

FRED (*whispers to* RICHARD)
Now— (*To* LOUISE.) Wait a moment.

LOUISE (*stopping willingly*)
Oh, no. I shall leave this man forever.

FRED (*to* RICHARD)
Well, why don't you say it?

RICHARD (*battling with his rising temper*)
Where are you going?

LOUISE (*annihilating him with a glance*)
What is that to you?

RICHARD (*losing all self-control*)
Not a tinker's curse!

LOUISE (*bitterly*)
At least I won't have people swearing at me. You won't see me in a hurry.

RICHARD
I should worry.

FRED (*whispers to* RICHARD)
Say it now—tell her—

LOUISE
What are you two whispering about?

FRED
Quick!

RICHARD (*ignoring him and glaring at* LOUISE)
What is that to you?

LOUISE (*glaring back at him*)
If you got down on your knees now it wouldn't do any good.

RICHARD (*fuming*)
I can see myself on my knees.

FRED (*tearing his hair*)
Louise, keep quiet a minute.

LOUISE
I hope I never see your face again.

RICHARD
Ditto.

FRED
Richard has something to say.

LOUISE
Oh, he has, has he?

RICHARD
I have not.

LOUISE
I wish I had never laid eyes on you.

RICHARD
Ditto, dear Lord!
(*He throws off an imploring arm which* FRED *has laid on him.*)

LOUISE
You—you—

RICHARD (*unexpectedly*)
I LOVE YOU!

LOUISE (*checks a bitter retort. After a hushed pause she asks softly, incredulously*)
What—what did you say?

RICHARD (*repeats in a quavering whisper*)
Louise, I love you.

LOUISE (*transfixed with joy*)
Do you really mean it?
(RICHARD *nods and holds out his arms. She throws herself into them.*)
Darling!

RICHARD
Dearest!

LOUISE
Sweetheart!

RICHARD
I apologize for what I said.
(*Kisses her.*)

LOUISE
No, I apologize. It was all my fault.
(*Kisses him.*)

RICHARD
No, precious. It was my fault.

LOUISE
I'm a mean wretch.

RICHARD
You're an angel! I'm a—

LOUISE (*stopping his mouth with a kiss*)
You're my sweet love!

FRED (*whom they have completely ignored in their joy, gives a sickening groan at their raptures*)
Oh, Lord!
(*They both turn to him.*)

RICHARD
What's the matter?

FRED (*forcing a smile*)
Nothing. I'm just delighted.

LOUISE (*puts her arm around him*)
You're a dear!

RICHARD (*slapping him heartily on the back*)
Thanks, old man.

LOUISE
I must telephone to Agnes.
(*Goes out happily.*)

RICHARD
You can count on me.

FRED
What for?

LOUISE (*returns*)
She'll be overjoyed. I must tell the cook—
(*She runs out again.*)

RICHARD
I'll do the same thing for you—make it up—patch it up—

FRED (*puzzled*)
Patch what up?

RICHARD
When you're married, you know.

FRED (*with a comprehensive stare*)
O-o-oh!

LOUISE (*calling from without*)
Richard, darling. . . .

RICHARD
Coming, love. (*He goes out smiling.* FRED *looks after him, murmuring to himself.*) Make it up—patch it up—when you're married. (*A frightened look creeps into his face. He takes the engagement ring out of his pocket and stares at it, paralyzed with a growing fear. Like one mesmerized he repeats in a hollow whisper.*) Make it up—patch it up— (*He stands stock still, a picture of woe. Suddenly he groans.*) Oh, Lord! Not that! Not that! (*A minute later* AGNES *enters.*)

AGNES (*rushing to him joyfully*)
Fred, darling! Louise told me. . . .

FRED (*hastily slipping the ring into his pocket again—speaks half-heartedly.*)
Oh, hello—hello.

AGNES
I'm so glad! Where are they? (*Embraces him ecstatically.*) I'm wild with joy! (*Calls.*) Louise! Richard!

FRED
Listen, Agnes—I want to tell you something.

AGNES
I know. You won the bet. Give me back the ring.

FRED (*hides the pocket which holds the ring*)
I don't mean that. . . .
(*Hesitates and groans.*)

AGNES (*notices his strange manner for the first time*)
What's the matter, dear? Don't you feel well?

FRED (*stumbling*)
Yes—yes—that is—I don't—I want to tell you something.

AGNES (*drawing him to her tenderly*)
What is it, darling? Was it very hard for you?

FRED (*stands stiffly, resisting her embrace*)
The fact is, Agnes, please . . .

AGNES
Ask anything you like. I take back everything I said before.

FRED
Don't take it back. (*Groans wretchedly.*) Agnes—please—don't let's get married!

AGNES (*wide-eyed*)
Don't let's . . .

FRED
We—we—mustn't get married.

AGNES
What then?

FRED
Nothing—nothing at all.

AGNES
What are you talking about?

FRED
Our engagement is broken. Let it stay broken.

AGNES
You don't want to marry me?

FRED
No, Agnes.

AGNES (*frightened*)
Don't you love me any more?

FRED
I do—I do—but we mustn't get married. We'll be so unhappy if we do. We'll be walking straight into misery.

AGNES
That's just what I told you before and you laughed at me.

FRED
I know I did, but I didn't know anything about marriage then. Since I've been living with Louise and Richard I've been very close to it. I don't want to get any closer.

AGNES
But it's all right now. They've made it up. It's all right now. They're happy again.

FRED
I know, but . . .

AGNES
It must be that you stopped loving me.

FRED
I do love you. It's just because I love you that I don't want to marry you. I'll make you miserable.

AGNES
Why should you make me miserable?

FRED
For the same reason that Richard makes Louise miserable. And you'll make me miserable, too.

AGNES
No, I won't. I love you.

FRED
So does Louise love Richard and see how miserable she makes him. And you said yourself that you couldn't do any better than Louise— (*She bites her lips.*) And I know I couldn't do any better than Richard. Our marriage wouldn't be any happier than theirs.

AGNES
You're using my words against me.

FRED

I've learned the truth of them. I've had an awful week. You don't know what misery I've lived through in this house. The quarreling, the angry looks, the bitterness. the sarcasm, the silence— Oh, the dumb silence between an angry husband and wife! The silence of the tomb is cheerful compared to it. And sitting between them at meals I've learned things about myself I never suspected before. I really have horrible habits.

AGNES

You have horrible habits!

FRED

I scrape my spoon atrociously—I gulp my food loudly—I breathe heavily, like an ox. I never noticed these things before when I ate with others, but sitting at this silent table you should have heard me!

AGNES (*bewildered*)

Fred, what is the matter with you? You are so—so different.

FRED

I know it. I've been through an awful experience.

AGNES

But you'll get over it.

FRED (*laughs hysterically*)

I may get over it, but I'll never be the same again. That isn't a joke. I'll never be the same again. I really mean it. I'm different. I feel differently about things—about marriage. I tell you Agnes, it's for the best. We mustn't get married.

AGNES (*icily*)

Of course, I'm not going to urge you.

FRED
Don't be angry, darling. Try to understand.

AGNES
I do understand. You've changed your mind. You can consider our engagement broken.

LOUISE (*enters joyfully*)
Ah, here she is. Agnes, darling. . . .

AGNES (*goes to her*)
I'm so glad for you, dear.
(*She bursts into tears.*)

LOUISE (*alarmed*)
Why, what's the matter?

RICHARD (*enters*)
Hello! (*Stops in amazement on seeing* AGNES *in tears. Looks at* FRED.) What's the matter?

FRED (*fidgeting*)
It's deucedly awkward. I . . .

AGNES
Fred's broken our engagement. He doesn't want to marry me.

LOUISE AND RICHARD
What?

FRED
Now don't distort things. It's not that I don't want to marry *you*. I don't want to marry any one. I don't want to marry at all.

RICHARD
Then what *do* you want?

FRED
I don't want anything. (*Wearily.*) I want peace.

RICHARD
Well, that's funny. Just when you've straightened us out you back out yourself. It seems to me with our joy before your eyes—
(*He embraces* LOUISE.)

FRED
And what was it like half an hour ago? Was that joy?

RICHARD
That doesn't count.

LOUISE
That's all forgotten.

FRED
I haven't forgotten. The horror of this week is still fresh in my mind. Frankly, I don't want to get married.

LOUISE
Did you ever hear such nonsense!

FRED
You yourself said you wished you had never married. You said so too, Richard.

RICHARD
Do you believe what a man says when he's crazy?

FRED
When I told you you were crazy you said you were never so sane in your life.

RICHARD
Of course a crazy man thinks he is sane.

LOUISE
You'll never know what happiness is unless you're married.

FRED
But you said . . .

LOUISE (*impatiently*)
Forget it— (*She comforts* AGNES.) I'm surprised at you, Fred. I didn't take you for a jilt.

FRED (*horrified at the accusation*)
I'm not a jilt!

AGNES
Please—please don't defend me. If he's ceased to care for me . . .

FRED
I haven't ceased to care for you and you know it. I'm considering your welfare as well as my own. I simply don't want to get married. I think marriage is hell.

LOUISE
Then why did you try so hard to reconcile Richard and me?

FRED
I didn't think so then. It wasn't until afterward, when I saw the whole ridiculous performance—the scrapping first and the billing and cooing afterward—God! It made me sick! (*Groans.*) I love Agnes dearly. I don't want to be hating her one minute and kissing her the next.
(AGNES *goes to the couch and sits there weeping.*)

LOUISE
Look what you're doing to her.

FRED
I'm sorry. (*Watches* AGNES *for a moment in wretched silence.*) Didn't you yourself say that marriage was a failure?

AGNES (*sobbing*)
I did when I thought they would separate. But now they're happy—we can be happy, too.

LOUISE (*pulling* FRED *to the couch*)
Comfort her. Tell her you're not serious.

RICHARD (*pulling him on the other side*)
Come—don't be a fool.

FRED (*resisting them*)
But you both said . . .

LOUISE
Never mind what we said.

RICHARD
We didn't know what we were saying.

FRED (*piteously*)
But I don't want to live like that.
(AGNES *bursts out afresh.*)

RICHARD
You'll miss the best part of life. Don't you want a sweet little wife and a happy home?

FRED
Certainly, but . . .

RICHARD (*pulling him along*)
Then get married.

FRED (*still battling for freedom*)
But what I saw here last week . . .

LOUISE
Forget what you saw here last week. It was an off week.
(*They have him at the couch now.*)

FRED (*to* AGNES)
I'm sure you'll stop loving me soon.

AGNES
No, I won't, Fred. I'll love you forever.

FRED (*looks about in despair. Suddenly he gets an idea. He braces himself by taking a deep breath and shouts*)
I wish I had never laid eyes on you!

AGNES (*aghast*)
What!

FRED (*as before*)
Dammit!
(LOUISE *and* RICHARD *let go of him in their astonishment.*)

AGNES (*rises furiously*)
How dare you!

FRED
Shut up!

AGNES (*hotly*)
How dare you talk to me like that? I don't want to see you again, ever.

FRED (*cunningly, laughing*)
See—see—that's what I'll say to you after we're married, and that's what you'll say to me. Louise and Richard have been talking like that all week.

AGNES (*sees that she has fallen into a trap*)
Oh! (*She covers her face with her hands.*)

RICHARD
You're telling tales out of school.

LOUISE
But we loved each other all the time. And Agnes will love you, too, no matter what she may say.

FRED
I don't believe it. Did she love me just now?

AGNES
Yes, I did.

FRED
But when you said . . .
(AGNES *nods, sobbing.*)

LOUISE
You brute! Can't you say a kind word to her?

FRED
But it's all so foolish.

RICHARD (*seriously*)
There's true love beneath the folly, Fred. Pure gold—real happiness. Come, where's the ring?

FRED (*takes it out of his pocket and looks at it doubtfully*)
Will you take it, Agnes? (*She stretches out her hand. He puts the ring on her finger. With sudden longing he clasps her in his arms.*) My sweet darling!

AGNES
Fred, dearest!

LOUISE (*turns happily to* RICHARD)
Richard!

RICHARD (*embracing her*)
Louise!

CURTAIN FALLS

PRINCE GABBY

A Comedy

by Jane Murfin

"Prince Gabby" is based upon a short story, "The Talkative Burglar," by Edgar Wallace, who has granted permission to Miss Murfin to make this dramatization of his work.

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JANE MURFIN

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PRINCE GABBY

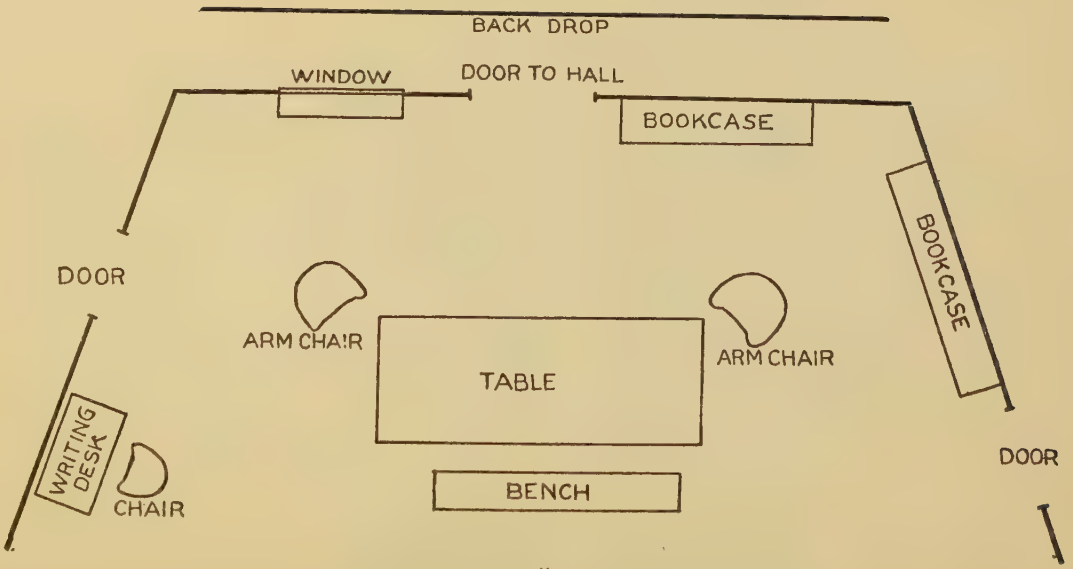
The success of Miss Murfin's diverting comedy depends chiefly upon a smooth and finished performance. The burglar in particular must be suave. The audience as well as Mr. Canton should feel his rather awe-inspiring poise, his distinction of speech and manner, and his natural charm. The setting can be simple but possessing the air of refinement and dignity which should pervade the entire play.

PROPERTY LIST

For the Burglar
- Flashlight
- Jeweled box
- Decanter
- Glass

For Canton
- Revolver
- Newspaper

For the Policeman
- Revolver



STAGE PLAN FOR "PRINCE GABBY"

PRINCE GABBY

CHARACTERS

CANTON
MILLICENT
THE BURGLAR
A POLICEMAN

AT RISE: *Curtain rises disclosing dark stage. Presently door U R opens and a man enters. He flashes a light around the room and goes quickly to table D L. A noise is heard outside and he flashes light on door U C. Listens and noise is repeated, goes stealthily toward door R when C door opens and a man stands in the light which comes in from adjoining room. He levels revolver and reaches for the switch.*

CANTON
Who's there?

BURGLAR (*calmly*)
It's all right.

CANTON
All right, be damned! (*Turns on light.*) Don't move! Stand over there! (*Indicates D L.*)

BURGLAR
All right—just as you say.

CANTON
What are you doing here?

BURGLAR
Whatever you tell me to—just at present.

CANTON (*shortly*)
You're sensible.

BURGLAR
Thanks—and cautious. You're not holding me up with a monkey wrench, are you?

CANTON
You should recognize a colt automatic when you face it.

BURGLAR
I do, but you see I go to the movies. . . .

CANTON
I'll take your gun if you don't mind.

BURGLAR
I don't carry one. Burglary is a business with me—not a sport.

CANTON
Afraid of firearms, eh?

BURGLAR
If you'll excuse my saying so, they're silly things to play with. You can't reason with 'em, and there's no situation in life that isn't improved by sensible quiet reasoning.

CANTON (*mildly sarcastic, as he moves sidewise toward a desk telephone*)
So you favor complete disarmament. . . .

BURGLAR
Decidedly. When a man can't kill an enemy, he'll have to think about him—and if you think enough about him you come to understand him and when you understand him he's no longer an enemy.

CANTON (*more sarcastically*)
How interesting!

BURGLAR
Isn't it! (*Sees* CANTON *hesitate and look toward the door.*) Hadn't you better telephone the police?

CANTON (*ironically*)
I'd thought of it. (*Goes to door and calls.*) Oh, Millicent!

MILLICENT (*faintly, in distance*)
Yes, what is it?

CANTON
Put on your gown and come down if you want to see a real burglar. (*Turns to* BURGLAR, *who, realizing a lady is to be present, removes his coat and fixes his tie.*) Unless I am very much mistaken, a famous one at that . . . aren't you the fellow they call Prince Gabriel?

BURGLAR
I am called Prince Gabriel though more often "Gabby" by my friends. (CANTON *laughs.*) You get the allusion, I see.

CANTON
Do you always talk so much?

BURGLAR
I'm afraid so. It keeps me from thinking. (*Moves toward interesting etching on wall.*) Whistler—isn't it?

CANTON (*laughs shortly*)
Stay where you are! (BURGLAR *bows and returns to position.* CANTON *goes to telephone.*) Hello, Central—hello—get me Fourth Street Police . . .

BURGLAR
They're temporarily disconnected—try Police Headquarters. Besides, it's nearer.

CANTON
Hello—hello—not connected? Well, give me Police Headquarters.

BURGLAR
Ask for Captain O'Grady. He's in the chair to-night.

CANTON
How do you know?

BURGLAR
Why shouldn't I know?

CANTON
Hello, is this the Police Headquarters? Is Captain O'Grady there? Oh, is that you, Captain?—I wish you'd send a man to my house. I am John Canton, Bay View—as soon as you can—Yes, a burglar. Thanks. (*To* BURGLAR.) I'm obliged to you.

BURGLAR (*who has been examining a jeweled box—sees* CANTON *looking at him, quickly returns box to its place on the table and says amiably*)
Amusing imitation, isn't it? (CANTON *grunts at his impudence.* BURGLAR *returns to subject.*) Naturally I know a great deal more about police arrangments than you, and, personally, I like headquarters better—the cells are new and fairly clean and the company is a better class.

CANTON (*after observing him a few moments*)
What will you get? You're a cool devil—what will you get?

BURGLAR
Five years in State's prison. It's rather a pity. I was hoping to see the Futurity run.

CANTON
You take it calmly enough!

BURGLAR

Why not? No use worrying. I made a mistake. The minute I came into this room and smelled that whisky and soda, I knew I had made what my disreputable associates would call "an error."
(*Looks at whisky and soda.*)

CANTON (*gets the hint and smiles*)
Help yourself.

BURGLAR

Thanks. You're kind. It's likely to be my last for some little time, too. (*Smells whisky.*) I see you haven't any more respect for the law than I have, Mr. Canton.
(*He drinks.*)

CANTON (*gives him a quick look and then grins as he realizes his own lawlessness*)
You know me then. . . .

BURGLAR

Oh, yes, sir—aside from the fact that you are quite as well known as—as I am, I never visit any house unless I know the occupants. And I always choose a time when there is no one home.

CANTON (*significantly*)
Always?

BURGLAR

I thought you were on your vacation. You left town on Friday.

CANTON

I came back again.

BURGLAR

So it would seem.

CANTON
How does it happen that you—a man of your class and obvious education—a burglar . . .

BURGLAR
Why is it that everybody is so shocked because people of "my class" take up a profession that means hard work?—and isn't overcrowded?

CANTON
Because a man of your talents could earn a better living within the law.

BURGLAR
You're wrong. I tried it—once, but I was too honest to succeed in business—

CANTON
Honest! You!

BURGLAR
Even so, as it is I am frankly a burglar—no more, no less. People know I am likely to walk in any time and so they protect themselves against me. I sail under my true colors and I hold my head high. But as a business man, I had to be a burglar and a confidence man and an expert at a number of other highly specialized professions . . . while sailing under the colors of a respectable rotarian. I wasn't sufficiently versatile and so, as I said before—I was too honest to be a success at it.

CANTON
Humph!

BURGLAR
I hope you don't mind me being a bit chatty while we wait—I don't usually have a chance to exchange ideas with a—customer—like this.

CANTON
No, I suppose not.

BURGLAR
And I'm always so interested in them, too—I should like to know more about them—if they're happy—and if not, why not. . . . Human relationships are my hobby, Mr. Canton.

CANTON
You're an unusual person—don't you ever feel you are wasting your abilities doing this sort of thing?

BURGLAR
Don't you think it takes ability to get away with this sort of thing?

CANTON
Not much—it's mostly luck, I should say.

BURGLAR (*morosely*)
Perhaps you're right. In these days it isn't necessary to have any high degree of craftsmanship in my profession—any finesse—any joy in one's art as it were. I regret to say it has become the custom to do things in a more primitive unimaginative way.

CANTON
Such as a loaded cane . . .

BURGLAR
Oh, much more humane than that. Nowadays a van backs up to the door of your house, six men walk in and attend to your family while six others remove your furniture, including the safe. Before any one has recovered from the shock and telephoned the police, the van is out of sight and the thing is accomplished with neatness and dispatch and with mutual respect on all sides.

CANTON (*smiling*)
You prefer working alone, I take it.

BURGLAR
Every time, Mr. Canton! The van idea is too crude—too uninspired—it's like running Man O' War against Spark Plug. Man O' War will win, but what of it?

CANTON (*after a pause*)
So you want to see the Futurity run—why?

BURGLAR
I know the horse that will romp home with the treasure!

CANTON
Oh, you do! (BURGLAR *nods.*) So do I, my friend.

BURGLAR
You mean your filly—don't be funny!

CANTON
What the devil do you mean? I tell you she will win and win easily.

BURGLAR
Glittering Venus! How blind these owners are! However, it isn't worth discussion. I had hoped to make enough to retire. To tell the truth, I've already backed the horse. I backed her to win fifty thousand dollars. It took a lot of—*work* to make up the stake.

CANTON
Well, you'll lose your money.

BURGLAR (*mildly sarcastic*)
So say you!

CANTON
You don't agree?

BURGLAR
I most certainly do not. That policeman takes a long time, doesn't he?

CANTON
What is the name of your horse?

BURGLAR
I'm sorry, I don't feel justified in telling—because, you see, I gathered my information under rather—delicate circumstances. I was burgling the owner's house and I heard the strength of the trial. The gentleman—er—was telling a lady.
(*Door C opens and a woman in negligee appears. Both men rise.*)

MILLICENT
This isn't . . .

CANTON
Yes it is—a burglar—a gentleman burglar.

BURGLAR
Excuse me—the term is somewhat offensive—and contradictory. There can't be a gentleman burglar any more than there can be an honorable liar.

MILLICENT (*to* CANTON)
What have you done?

CANTON
Sent for the police.
(MILLICENT *looks about the room.*)

BURGLAR
Nothing has been disturbed. I can assure you on that point, madam. I was, as the newspapers say, "interrupted at my nefarious work."

CANTON
Just as you interrupted him in an interesting confession.

MILLICENT
I am sorry—won't you sit down?

BURGLAR (*pushing chair towards her*)
Allow me.
(MILLICENT *sits.*)

CANTON
You must hear this, dear. It touches us both. Our friend knows a horse that will beat mine—overheard in the course of one of his midnight forays, the owner telling a lady—

MILLICENT (*quickly*)
Overheard—what horse is this?

BURGLAR (*looks at* MILLICENT *queerly—then quickly changes expression*)
You mustn't ask me the name of the horse because it involves—I broke into a house here less than a week ago. The owner was supposed to be out of town—there were no servants about so I took my time. I finally came to the dining room—and you can imagine my surprise to discover the table laid for supper. A delicate little supper, too—wines, exotic fruits, liqueurs—too rich a feast for an entertaining servant. While I was looking at the table by the light of my lamp, I heard the front door open and voices in the hall. I just had time to slide into a little room when they entered.

MILLICENT
And—what did they do?

BURGLAR
Well, they ate and they drank and they—*talked!* Finally the lady and gentleman were left alone together.

MILLICENT
Did you—did you see her face?

BURGLAR
I caught a glimpse.

MILLICENT (*involuntarily gasps*)
Oh!

CANTON (*casually*)
The gentleman's wife, I suppose.

BURGLAR
Er—no—I don't think the gentleman is married. He didn't act as if she were his wife.

CANTON (*smiling*)
Oh!

BURGLAR
It was a bit embarrassing for me, I admit. I come of good New England stock and, well—I'm not altogether modernized yet. . . .

MILLICENT
Well, what—what did you do?

BURGLAR
What could I do? I ask you, madam. . . .

MILLICENT
You—you could have made your presence known.

BURGLAR
And have been arrested.

MILLICENT
They wouldn't have dared arrest you.

BURGLAR
I'm not a blackmailer, Mrs. Canton.

MILLICENT
So you stood like a coward—listening!

BURGLAR
I stood listening not because I am a coward—but because I'm cautious.

CANTON
My dear, be reasonable. What on earth was he to do?

BURGLAR

What, indeed! So I stayed, and after—quite a little time—the gentleman became confidential—he spoke of the Futurity. I heard him tell the lady that "so and so thinks he will win, but I shall beat him!"

CANTON

Do you remember the name?

BURGLAR

Let me see—it was a curious name—in fact, it must have been a nickname.

CANTON

And it was . . .

BURGLAR

It was—why I had it on the tip of my tongue—it was—a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, no, o, p, q, r, oh, I remember. It was "Ronny."

CANTON

Ronny! Why, he meant me. Who on earth could . .

MILLICENT

And the lady—did she—what did she say?

BURGLAR

She laughed, I remember. Then he told her of the trial. And he was telling her the truth.

CANTON

He may have boasted.

BURGLAR

I think not. Men seldom lie on side issues. It rang true to me. As for me, I saw a way out. I'm not a betting man—it isn't safe as burglary.

MILLICENT (*interrupting*)
Excuse me a moment—you're such a discerning person—let me ask you something. . . .

BURGLAR
Certainly, madam.

MILLICENT
Do men speak the truth only on side issues? There was a big issue there, wasn't there? (BURGLAR *looks at her queerly—she tries to explain.*) You see, as a woman these things interest me. The gentleman probably told the lady he loved her—was he lying when he told her that? I ask you because you have no illusions—you saw them as they were—in a different light than—I, for instance, would see them.

CANTON
My dear, we can't expect a—this young man to talk philosophy at the crack of dawn.

MILLICENT (*paying no attention to her husband*)
You don't answer me.

BURGLAR (*recalling his thoughts*)
No, I didn't say a word—you ask a question which is not easy to answer. Love is very difficult to detect under normal circumstances. When a house is on fire, it is almost impossible to decide whether the kitchen stove is on fire also. The man was aglow with the vital spark, but whether that spark would eventually kindle the divine flame—of that, Madam, I am not a judge.

CANTON
You people are getting away from the main point. I want to know the name of this wonderful horse.

BURGLAR
And I cannot tell you.

CANTON
Why not?

BURGLAR (*annoyed*)
Obviously, if I tell you the horse, you know the owner—if you know the owner you may infer the lady. No self-respecting burglar would be guilty of betraying . . .

CANTON (*interrupts*)
Stuff! This is ridiculous. Here we are at two o'clock in the morning taking lessons in morality from a second-story man. Look here, you're a sporting sort of a devil and I'll make you a sporting offer.

MILLICENT (*quickly*)
You mustn't make any bargains with this man.

CANTON
My dearest girl—if you think I have any other reason than to gratify my curiosity, you are wrong. It makes no difference to me. I don't bet—but I'm curious. I'll make this offer . . .

BURGLAR
My dear fellow, no offer you make will change my mind.

CANTON
Now look here—there is only one horse in the race I am afraid of—you know which that is, Millicent. It is a horse owned by my best friend—Arthur Sherman— Why, it was only to-night you were telling me, dear, that Arthur thinks his horse Black Lily will win. Is that the horse?

BURGLAR (*shakes his head*)
Suppose I said yes—it wouldn't be nice hearing for you—his best friend—nor for the lady.

CANTON
The lady—oh, I had forgotten her. (*Shrugs shoulders.*)

But young men are young men, my friend—was it Arthur Sherman?
(*Bell rings—they listen.*)

BURGLAR
The officer.

CANTON (*goes toward door*)
Was it Arthur Sherman?

BURGLAR
No—it was not Arthur Sherman.

CANTON
H'm. (*Bell rings again.*) Give me your word you won't try to escape.

BURGLAR
Sure, I won't try . . .
(CANTON *goes out—burglar grabs coat and hat and starts for window*)

MILLICENT
You are very discreet and very kind!

BURGLAR (*stops and looks at her*)
I don't understand you.

MILLICENT
Oh, don't pretend, please. You know it was Sherman and you saw the woman.

BURGLAR
Yes—I saw the woman.

MILLICENT (*miserably*)
It was last Wednesday.

BURGLAR
You are wrong; it was last Friday.

MILLICENT
Wednesday, I think.

BURGLAR
Pardon me—Friday. I know my own working schedule.

MILLICENT
Oh, let's finish this farce. I know you know—don't pretend. You can get your freedom—buy it from my husband. Tell him I was the woman you saw in Sherman's house on Wednesday night. Tell him the others in the party were sent home in Sherman's automobile and I stayed there waiting for the car to come back. You saw—you heard him say he—loved me—pleaded with me to divorce my husband to marry him—you heard it all and you know what I said to him. Well, all you have to do is tell my husband that—and you will go free.

BURGLAR
Mrs. Canton—you are mad to make such a confession to a man like me—it was Friday night that I broke into Sherman's house—do you hear? Friday—and the woman was *not* you!

MILLICENT (*turning away and wringing her hands*)
Oh, you're wrong. I left town on Friday.

BURGLAR (*with emphasis*)
Mrs. Canton, it was the night of the Art Ball! Friday! Sherman had been there—he was in costume. It was the costume of a Confederate officer. The lady was *not* you!

MILLICENT (*after a breathless pause—whispers hoarsely; grasping his arm*)
You lie—you know that's not true—say you invented this—say it—say it isn't so. . . .

BURGLAR
It is true, Mrs. Canton.

MILLICENT
Oh, and this woman—if it *is* true—who was the woman?

BURGLAR
I can't tell you that.

MILLICENT (*her eyes burn into his but his gaze doesn't waver*)
You swear? (BURGLAR *doesn't move. She turns away.*) It's true. Why should you lie to me? So that's the sort he is— (*Laughs hysterically.*) with his art and his ideals—his cults and his music—his philosophy and his understanding of women. Oh what a fool I've been!

BURGLAR
Madam, I blundered in telling you that, but I didn't understand—your husband may return any moment—don't let him see you so disturbed.

MILLICENT (*still laughing hysterically*)
What does it matter?

BURGLAR
Mrs. Canton, don't be a fool!
(*This brings her to—she realizes he intends to help her.*)

MILLICENT
You mean you don't intend to tell my husband—to buy your freedom?

BURGLAR
You forgot, the lady I saw was not you!

MILLICENT
But I have told you, I . . .

BURGLAR
You have told me nothing, madam. . . .

MILLICENT (*after a moment of realization*)
Tell me what you know of Arthur Sherman—will you?—please?

BURGLAR
What all the world knows—that he's a blackguard. Why women fall for him is beyond me—decent women, too.

MILLICENT (*breaks—half laughing at herself—half crying*)
I—I wrote to him after what he told me Wednesday night. I thought he was miserable—unhappy—I couldn't bear that—so I wrote to him . . .
(*Laughs hysterically to keep from sobbing.*)

BURGLAR
You will excuse me, madam—but I wish to understand you—you refused to accept Arthur Sherman's offer of marriage—and you wrote to him because you were sorry to have disappointed him—is that it?

MILLICENT
I told him that Wednesday night, but I wrote to him because—because I cared for him and I wanted him to know—I thought he would be less miserable if he knew. I told him if he still wanted me in six months, I'd do as he asked.

BURGLAR
Have you written him only once?

MILLICENT
Yes, only once.

BURGLAR
When did you mail it?

MILLICENT
Last evening.

BURGLAR
Do you know—is Sherman in the city to-night?

MILLICENT
I don't know— (*Wearily thinks.*) No, he is not expected until to-morrow.

BURGLAR
Then he hasn't received your letter yet?

MILLICENT
No—what are you going to do?

BURGLAR (*grabs coat and starts to put it on*)
I am going to get that letter.

MILLICENT
But if Sherman should be there?

BURGLAR
That will be unlucky for one of us. (*Stops and looks back at her.*) You will excuse my going out this way—but habit is very difficult to change. When I come back to-morrow with your letter, I'll ring the front door bell and send up my card.

MILLICENT (*a bit flutteringly*)
At what time do you think. . . .

BURGLAR
Will—four o'clock be convenient?

MILLICENT (*just a little sentimentally*)
Perfectly. I shall be waiting for you.

BURGLAR
There's just one condition I must insist upon—you know there is always a price for everything in this quaint world of ours. . . .

MILLICENT
And what is the price I must pay?

BURGLAR
That you promise me not to tell your husband about this letter or your—interest in Arthur Sherman.

MILLICENT
But I *must* tell my husband—I must confess. . . .

BURGLAR (*brutally*)
You must *not* confess—excuse me—I know confession is an exquisite pleasure and a great solace, but this time you must deny yourself. . . .
(*They hear* CANTON)

BURGLAR (*continuing*)
Think of your husband—he's entitled to his ignorance. Promise me.

MILLICENT
But—he thinks I'm an angel. . . .

BURGLAR
Don't be silly!

MILLICENT (*angrily*)
Sir!

BURGLAR
Please excuse me—I spoke hurriedly—I mean, he's a man, like all husbands—and he probably knows that women are just as human as men and even do foolish things occasionally—

MILLICENT
You don't know John.

BURGLAR
Perhaps not—but I don't think he should be told about something that was not his fault and would only make him unhappy.

MILLICENT
How do you know it was not his fault?

BURGLAR
He's coming. Do you promise?

MILLICENT
Why are you so interested in my husband's peace of mind?

BURGLAR
I owe it to him. He caught me to-night fairly—and according to all the rules I should be paying the penalty. But I'm not going to pay the penalty, thanks to you—and I feel as though I were taking an—unsportsmanlike advantage of both of you. . . .

MILLICENT (*a little flirtatiously*)
Aren't you trying to protect *me* from my folly just a little bit, too?

BURGLAR
Perhaps. If you have only your own inclination to consider, you'll feel you must confess to your husband that you have been—er—er—shall we say—careless?

MILLICENT (*quickly*)
Oh, no—just stupid.

BURGLAR (*with a smile of satisfaction*)
Stupid—quite so—but if you promise me that you will say nothing to your husband about the affair—then you will have to keep your word—and instead of taking a rather questionable advantage of you—I shall feel I have done you both a real service.

MILLICENT
You have a very sensitive sense of honor, haven't you?

BURGLAR
Yes—I have. My profession requires it.

CANTON (*outside to servant*)
It's all right, Bradley, it's nothing. You needn't come down.

MILLICENT (*feverishly*)
Please go—before it's too late.
(*She takes his arm and leads him to window.*)

BURGLAR (*taking hold of portières*)
Do you promise?
(*Before* MILLICENT *can answer the door opens and* BURGLAR *slips quickly behind curtains*—MILLICENT *turns nervously towards* CANTON.)

CANTON (*in doorway*)
Just put out the hall light, Bradley—good-night. (*Enters.*) I thought I'd never get rid of that policeman—why, where's the burglar?

MILLICENT (*confused and fearful*)
I—I let him go. He's a gentleman, John.

CANTON
Well, I'm glad you did—I had the same idea—told the officer I'd mistaken one of the servants—he was very pleasant about it.
(MILLICENT *is surprised—wonders if she should tell* CANTON *that* BURGLAR *is still here—looks at* BURGLAR, *who guesses her thought and shakes his head "no."*)

MILLICENT
Don't you want to know why I let him go?
(BURGLAR *makes a movement of warning.*)

CANTON (*his back to hidden* BURGLAR)
Why, I understand why you did it. He's an interesting sort. I shouldn't have asked him about that man. He was perfectly right not to tell—a good sport.
(*Pours drink during speech.*)

MILLICENT
It *was* Arthur Sherman—with a woman!

CANTON (*not surprised*)
Oh!

MILLICENT
Did you know he was that sort?

CANTON
Why, yes—I know he is very attractive to women—always has an affair or two going on—
(BURGLAR *pantomimes to* MILLICENT—*"See, what did I tell you?"*)

MILLICENT (*turning from* BURGLAR *to* CANTON)
You never told me he was like that.

CANTON
My dear, a man doesn't tell those things about his best friend. What does it matter—he's no better, nor worse, for your knowing it. Just forget about it—be a *man!*
(BURGLAR *smiles with satisfaction.*)

MILLICENT (*refusing to look at* BURGLAR)
That's what the men do, is it? Just forget about it.

CANTON
Yes, that's it. Never think of it again and by all means never mention it—promise me you won't mention it.

MILLICENT (*laughs queerly*)
Oh, I won't mention it.

CANTON
That's right, and now you go to bed. I'm too waked up to sleep. I'll read the paper and finish this.
(*Indicates drink.*)

MILLICENT
Very well, good-night.

CANTON
Good-night, dear.
(BURGLAR *indicates his pleasure at the way* MILLICENT *has behaved and bows gallantly "good-night"—is about to make his getaway when* MILLICENT *turns suddenly to her husband.*)

MILLICENT (*comes to* CANTON'S *chair*)
Men are so different from women about that sort of thing, John. It would seem rather important to a woman—a thing that mattered . . .
(BURGLAR *stops and decides to wait—stands fully exposed —listening.*)

CANTON
That's where women are not as big, as broad—as men, my dear. We understand those things and treat them with the indifference they deserve. Human beings are human —you can't expect them to be angels.

MILLICENT
Does that go for the women, too?

CANTON
Why certainly—women are just as human as men—they probably do foolish things sometimes, too—what of it?
(BURGLAR *snickers, hides quickly*—CANTON *lifts head as if he had heard something*—MILLICENT *speaks quickly.*)

MILLICENT (*conscious of* BURGLAR)
Would you feel that way if I had been that woman, for instance?

CANTON (*harshly*)
You! Why, I don't know. (*Looks at her curiously—then throws off idea and laughs.*) What a silly notion—of course I'd feel that way—I hope I'm a modern man, and don't fool myself that my wife is any different from

any other man's just because she's mine—but of course I know it couldn't have been you.
(BURGLAR *peeks from behind curtains, grins.*)

MILLICENT
You're very broad-minded about things, John. I wish I felt like that . . .

CANTON
You will, my dear. Women will reach the same broad point of view that men have, some day, I hope . . .

MILLICENT
Yes. Perhaps they will. (*Looks at* BURGLAR *as she speaks.*) Good-night.

CANTON (*examining newspaper*)
Good-night.
(BURGLAR *bows again gallantly with a look of ardent admiration, knowing the good-night was for him. She throws him a rose from a bouquet on the table beside her. He catches it—makes an involuntary "face" as a thorn pierces his hand—then immediately the devoted cavalier kisses the rose and then tiptoes to balcony.*)

MILLICENT (*to* BURGLAR)
Four o'clock.
(BURGLAR *nods and goes silently over the rail.* MILLICENT *looks startled as she realizes she has spoken aloud.*)

CANTON (*engrossed in paper*)
Four o'clock— (*Looks at his watch.*) So it is—almost—I'll be right along as soon as I've finished this drink.

MILLICENT (*thoughtfully at door*)
He was too handsome to be a burglar. I wonder if he couldn't be reformed.

(CANTON *doesn't answer—she looks toward window through which* BURGLAR *has gone—smiles, sighs romantically and goes out.*)

CANTON (*after a pause*)
H'm. Women will be sentimental.

SLOW CURTAIN

DELILAH

A Tragedy

by Gilbert Emery

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DELILAH

This play can be made very effective. The characters are vividly drawn and the words they speak dramatic in the extreme. Amateurs are cautioned that while dramatic intensity and suspense must be created, it is easy to overdo the acting. The more striking speeches should be delivered without exaggeration.

The setting may be made elaborate, but it is far better to keep the stage absolutely simple. Reduce the hangings and furniture to a minimum, and let the atmosphere create itself, as it were, with only a hint from the stage carpenter.

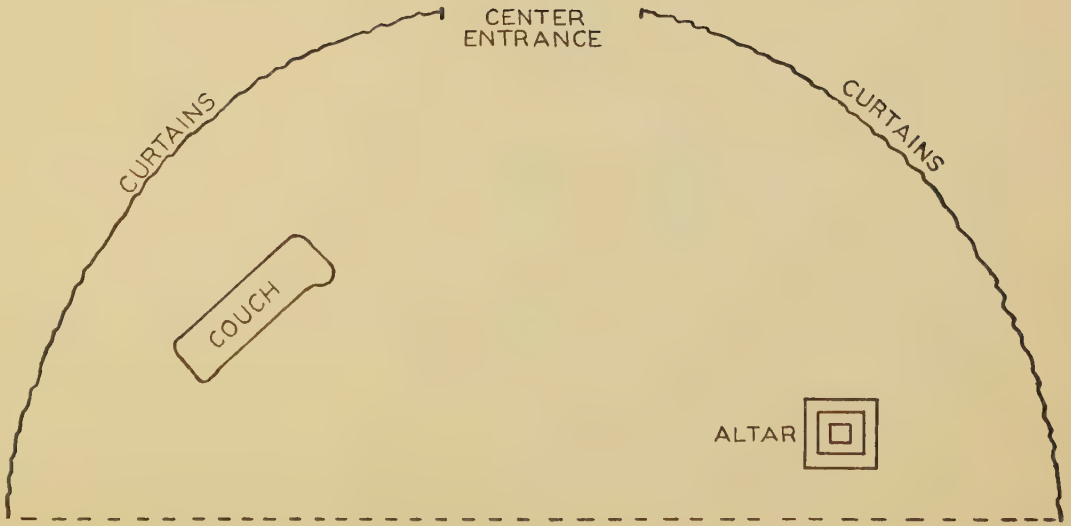
PROPERTY LIST

For Delilah

- Various jewels
- Coins
- Gold collar
- Cup
- Dagger

For Sampson

- Leopard skin
- False hair



STAGE PLAN FOR "DELILAH"

DELILAH

CHARACTERS

DELILAH, *a woman of Sorak*
SAMSON, *the Israelite*
A LORD OF THE PHILISTINES
A SLAVE

SCENE: *The action takes place in the house of* DELILAH *in the valley of Sorak near Gaza, during the period of the Judges of Israel.*

An upper chamber in the house of DELILAH *at Sorak. The room is elliptical in shape; its walls are hung with curtains of dull reds and blues. There is lower right, raised on a dais, a rich couch, covered with skins and fine stuffs. To the left is a small stone carven altar bearing a bronze image of the god Dagon. There are also in the room two or three huge terra cotta jars of white blossoming boughs. The curtains part center back to form an entrance to the room and on either side are high unlit torches. An unlit torch stands behind the couch. The skins of beasts are on the floor.*

It is night. There is no light at all at the rise of the curtain, save a small flicker of fire before the god. Somewhere in the distance is heard the fitful rise and fall of rude stringed instruments.

DELILAH, *the woman of Sorak, is but vaguely made out in the gloom, prostrate before the altar. She gives the sense*

of one in an abandonment of supplication, as she lies there prone. The music ceases for a moment; the fire before the god dies out utterly. An odd cry, as it were a bird, is heard outside. DELILAH *shudders and, rising, edges along the wall, fearfully, reluctantly, yet inevitably, to the parting of the curtains. Her hand falters, hesitating. At last with a great gesture of decision she pulls the curtains wide apart. The space is filled with the luminous blue of an oriental night sky. One sees that the room opens on a balcony with a low parapet.* DELILAH *snatches a lighted torch, fixed in a socket on the balcony and waves it desperately above her head as a sign. It falls, extinguished. With an inner sense of terrible adventure she turns back to the entrance where she cowers in the folds of the curtains.*

Immediately dark mantled figures of the lords of the Philistines—a half dozen or more—steal across the opening and disappear. The last of them stops and peers into the chamber. He sees DELILAH. *He makes a quick gesture of interrogation. She shakes her head. He enters boldly, seizes her by the arm and pulls her toward him.*

A LORD OF THE PHILISTINES
He is not here?

DELILAH
Who?

LORD
Who? The Israelite.

DELILAH (*sullenly*)
No.

LORD
Where is he?

DELILAH
He feasts with his comrades across the way. You can hear their music.

LORD
He comes here to-night—*surely?*

DELILAH
Yes. (*With a short laugh.*) He loves me.

LORD
I had your message from the slave—your dumb leprous eunuch—

DELILAH
Yes.

LORD
That the Israelite has sworn to tell you, to-night—the secret. . . . Well?

DELILAH
He has sworn.

LORD
Three times he has sworn. Three times he has lied.

DELILAH
I know.

LORD
How then can you be sure?

DELILAH
Has my Lord lived so long and not known that there comes a moment—ssh! (*They stand in motionless silence for an instant.*) It is nothing—there comes a moment when the man speaks his foolish heart and the woman, lying on his breast, hears the truth.

LORD
Woman of Sorak, you know your trade well.

DELILAH
How should I not? To-night I shall hear Samson's secret.

LORD (*pulling her roughly to him*)
If to-night you fail—well . . . the jackals of Sorak yelp hungrily beneath the walls.

DELILAH (*shivering with horror*)
I shall not fail.

LORD (*peering into her eyes*)
What ails you? It is not possible that— No! You—you love the swine? You love the Israelite—you and he—you'd trap us here! (*Calls.*) Oh, you, out there!

DELILAH (*her hand on his mouth*)
Be silent!—I—I hate him. I—I—look—leave him to me. Wait—in the inner room. Till I give the signal.

LORD (*turning to follow his companions*)
Is it the same sign? Remember—if you fail—! The jackals!

DELILAH (*catching his robe, her voice hoarse with avarice and greed*)
Lord—the price? My price?

LORD
Ah! The woman's price! Call your filthy slave. He has the chest.

DELILAH (*servile and eager*)
Thanks, Lord, O thanks! All? All that was promised? Thanks! Yes, the old sign. Here. By the door. So.

LORD (*menacingly*)
The jackals . . .

(*Exit.* DELILAH *lightly clasps her hands. Her slave, naked, save for a breech-clout, enters.*)

DELILAH

The chest? You have it, dog? (*The slave in inarticulate sounds assures her.*) Make a light there. Bring the chest. Quick!

(*The slave fetches fire, lights the torches to the right and left of the entrance, then drags in an iron-bound chest, which at* DELILAH'S *gesture he leaves where the glow of the torches fall on it. She dismisses the slave and throws back the cover of the box. As she gazes on the contents, she becomes like one possessed; her eyes glitter, her hands clasp and unclasp convulsively, her breath is short, for* DELILAH *is a miseress. Were it not for this price she could not betray the Israelite whom she so physically loves. Prudence induces her to hide the chest. Her eyes seek the door furtively. Yet as she begins to pull the box away the seduction of its contents overcomes her. She sinks to the floor and begins to draw forth great golden ornaments, jewel-set. Uncut jewels and pieces of golden money slip deliciously through her fingers into her lap. She fondles them, uttering little caressing cries; she tosses them into the air and catches them as they fall, utterly entranced.*

While DELILAH *is thus enthralled, the curtains part and* SAMSON, *the Israelite, appears. He has come from the feast and is drunk with wine and desire. He wears a great leopard skin over his shoulders, a white loincloth and sandals. Over his left ear is thrust a bunch of white narcissus. His arms and ankles are banded with golden circlets. He is sleek, strong, savage, splendid. His eyes rove the place till they light on* DELILAH. *He watches curiously, uncomprehendingly. Laughing softly he tiptoes toward her. Suddenly as he makes out the magnificence of her trinkets, the jewels, the gold, his face becomes livid with rage. A*

terrible sound breaks from him. DELILAH *glances back in horror and screams, as his hands make for her throat.*)

SAMSON
Ah!—ah!
(*He has her on her knees, her head bent back.*)

DELILAH (*inarticulately*)
No—no—no—no!
(*She writhes out of his grasp and rushes to the altar of Dagon, her back against it.*)

SAMSON
Woman of Sorak! Who has bought your precious love to-night with the pretty toys? (*He approaches slowly, stealthily, laughing.*) My white iris! My magnolia flower! Who has plucked you to-night—and paid, as men pay queens—and such as you?

DELILAH (*her eyes are on him in fear and dreadful admiration.*)
No—no—no! (*Suddenly she throws herself to the floor and crawls toward him till her arms are about his knees.*)
No—no! *You!*—Samson!

SAMSON
Where is he?

DELILAH
There is no one!—Samson!

SAMSON
Aye, he will have fled for fear of me. Who was he, woman? When I have broken your white, scented limbs, like snapping twigs, then I shall seek him. Who?

DELILAH
There was no one—Samson! O my love!

SAMSON (*with a gesture at the chest*)
That!

DELILAH
Mine! O mine! Mine! My dear love, all mine. Look at me—look! I have saved it—all of it—through the years. Gifts. From my kinsmen. Jewels of my mother. I was lonely to-night—so lonely waiting for you who feasted without me. I told the slave to bring the box and I played with the jewels forgetting. As a girl plays—innocently. My Lord, I was lonely for your coming. Look in my eyes—look. There's truth in my eyes.
(*She sobs.*)

SAMSON (*raising her slowly to her feet*)
There— No, girl, I will not see you weep. No, no! See, my pomegranate flower, see! I believe. It was the fear in my heart that you had ceased to love me. I believe now. Come—I will help you; let us put the silly treasures away.
(*He leads her toward the chest and they stoop to put back the scattered contents.*)

DELILAH (*softly*)
You believe—Samson?

SAMSON
I was maddened. It was the fear—here.
(*His hand at his heart.*)

DELILAH
I love you—like that. So fierce—so terrible. Once I saw the sea and a storm come. Like that. I was afraid. But I loved it. As I love you, Samson.

SAMSON
Look, the storm is over. The great wind kisses your little hands—so. There, see—all the trinkets are well-nigh packed away. This—this strange golden collar? A great

lord's possession this. (*He regards the collar closely.*) I seem to— (*He eyes her cunningly.*) Whence comes this?

DELILAH (*hesitant*)
My—my father—my father wore it—it was a gift to him —his father before him. I remember not rightly how—whence—

SAMSON (*with horrible calm*)
You lie. You have lied in all your story. I have seen this thing upon the neck of the First Lord of the Philistines; I will look a little longer into your eyes, just a little longer, that I may remember how false and blue such eyes can be. "Samson, there is truth in my eyes." Then I shall—
(*He makes a gesture of strangulation with his hands.*)

DELILAH (*she believes herself lost, yet she nerves herself for the last appeal*)
My Lord—O my great Lord! Do with me as you will. I have lied. Yet you are a just man. You will hear me —for this little last time. Say you will! There came this night, here to my house, here to this very room, your room—while I sat alone and waited for you—there came the great First Lord of the Philistines. He stole in upon me like a fox—my Lord, like one of the foxes you once sent into the ripe corn of the Philistines with firebrands in their tails. He had bribed my slave. He stole in upon me. He—he—O he was vile! He would have overpowered me but—I struck him with the torch—it lies there yonder upon the terrace. And he fell. There—just there. And he lay there—old and vile and horrible—and I laughed. His servants came with the chest of treasures —to buy me. That, all that is his. I drove him out—mocked him. How should I not?— For I am yours, my Lord, all yours—since that first day by the brook of Sorak.

SAMSON
Stop!

DELILAH
That first day. You were so strong and splendid that day I saw you first. (*As she continues her plea becomes more sincere, more touching. One realizes that in spite of her avarice, she loves the strength and beauty of* SAMSON.) I stood alone by the brook—do you remember, Samson? And you came striding by bearing a great dead lioness upon your shoulders—you were singing . . .

SAMSON
Have done with this!

DELILAH
Singing—and my heart sang, too. I saw you stop. Do you remember? Your eyes were in my eyes. Your lioness fell to the ground—and you were beside me. O the water of the brook was blue, blue with the sky! It was in the first coming of spring. And you touched my hand and said—softly as a lad might say it: "Who are you?" (SAMSON *has hidden his face in his hands.*) And I told you. "Delilah," I said. Do you remember, Samson? And all that afternoon we sat by the brook of Sorak—scarcely speaking. And at twilight when all the little stars came into the dark water—and the nightingales sang in the almond trees—ah, never like that have they sung again! At twilight you turned to me and kissed me upon the lips. (SAMSON *groans.*) What, my Lord? Kissed me and said: "Delilah, I love you." And I said: "I, too, love you." And hand-in-hand through the fields—all little flowers beneath our feet—we came—home. And when I said, in the night: "O you have forgotten the lioness you carried upon your shoulders!" You laughed and like a great boy, "You are my lioness, Delilah!" you answered me.

SAMSON
I would to God I had killed you—that first day—as I killed the lioness.

DELILAH
Since then I have been yours, my Lord, all yours. So I drove out the old fox and mocked him. But he left the chest of gold and jewels. O my Lord, I did but look upon them—and—and they were so beautiful. I love the gold. The rubies and emeralds. I am weak, so weak. I love them so. I did but look. They were so beautiful. I—I forgot. Then you came and I was afraid. My Lord, I feared you. I dared not tell. I lied.

SAMSON
And if I kill you, I kill my heart, too.

DELILAH
Samson—look—take my neck—put your fingers about it—close—tighter—tighter—tighter. I do not fear now. It is better, better so, my Lord. Look. (*She tears his hands from his face and tries to lace his fingers about her throat.*) Now—Samson—now!

SAMSON (*breaking into a spasm of sobs, he seizes her and buries his face in her breast.*)
Delilah!

DELILAH
Samson!

SAMSON (*recovering himself slowly as one in a daze*)
I who would have harmed you! (*He catches sight of the chest and his face hardens.*) Away with it! It is accursed. Out with it!

DELILAH (*humble but radiant over her triumph*)
My Lord—the slave shall take it away. To-morrow at dawn, he shall spit upon it and bear it back.

SAMSON (*imperiously*)
Go there to the box, you! You say you love the gold and the jewels. Well, you shall pay for your fault. Take those foul trinkets and throw them into the street below. The beggars will become rich.

DELILAH (*aghast*)
Oh! No! No! My jewels! My—no—no!

SAMSON
Go!

DELILAH
Oh!

SAMSON
You are mine. You have said that. Obey! (DELILAH *caught in the net she has woven, moves toward the chest, hesitates, draws back, her face distorted with anger and dismay. All the evil in her is rising up, yet she dare not disobey* SAMSON, *who has thrown himself upon the couch his eyes mercilessly upon her.*) Go on. Take all—all! Save but one tiny piece of gold, one jewel no bigger than a mustard seed, and I shall know it. Then at last I shall believe you.
(DELILAH *is forced to do his will. In a sort of blind passion she pulls open the curtains and begins to throw out the contents of the chest.* SAMSON *lies and chuckles as she proceeds with her odious task.*)

SAMSON
Now—oh, the big golden collar! Faster! The pretty, pretty gems! Yes, the beggars will sup well to-night! They're at them now in the street. Hear the dogs snarl over the bones! Hear them fight! Come—the bracelets —faster, faster! Deliliah throws forth gold to swine—oh, the generous, the rich, the beautiful Delilah!
(*At last it is finished. The woman is almost frantic with*

rage and chagrin. She lurks at the back, torn and twisted with fury, her nails in her flesh to keep from screaming and cursing.)

SAMSON
What are you doing there, my sweet one?

DELILAH
The air—I am stifling—I—

SAMSON
Close the curtains. Come here. I want you near me. Now you are my good child again and I love you. Make lights. It is gloomy here. Have wine brought.

DELILAH (*sullenly summoning the slave*)
Lights. Wine.

SAMSON
Why dost thou linger there? Come. Give me some wine. My anger burned my throat. Let us drink the balm of forgiveness—together. (*The slave lights the torch by the couch and brings a deep silver cup of wine.* DELILAH *composes herself with a tremendous effort and brings the wine-cup to* SAMSON.) Sit here. (*He gestures toward the dais at his feet.* DELILAH *gives him the wine; he drinks deep. She sits and he pulls her head to him, looking down into her eyes.*) Mine—mine! Now I know. Now I am certain. Nay, my love! Smile! What are these silly golden things to you? You, my lioness! My leopardess! Forget the toys. Laugh! We are of the open, you and I. We are of the hills and fields and forests and deserts. The sun and the stars are ours—and the wind and rain and rivers—our blood and bodies. Deep ties flood our hearts into one heart. We are the great lovers—the mighty. You, my leopardess, and I. I will take you into the mountains where we shall mount up with wings as eagles—touch the blue and crimson stars. There

you shall find again your jewels, beloved, there in the stars. Golden dawns—silver streams of morning. The cloth of the gold of twilight. They shall be your garments—Oh, my great love! Give me drink! Come closer!

DELILAH (*hating, yet fascinated*)
You are strong—oh, you are strong! Have you *no* weakness? It cannot depart from you, your strength? Samson?

SAMSON (*craftily*)
Yes—there is—a secret. (*Laughs.*) Oh, I am strong. None stronger than I. I am strong with the strength of my God.

DELILAH
Tell me—beloved!

SAMSON (*reminiscent*)
Do you remember? The tales I told you? "Out of the water came forth sweetness"? Eh? I rent the lion as if he were a kid. And the honey in his carcass. They would never have guessed the riddle, if it had not been for that whining white rat, I took to wife. She wrung the answer out of me by her seven-days' sniveling.

DELILAH
Was she beautiful, Samson?

SAMSON
I do not know. I have seen you. (*He chants.*) "With the jawbone of an ass, heaps and heaps. With the jawbone of an ass have I smitten a thousand men." I am strong—strong—strong! None but my God and I know the secret.

DELILAH
My great, beautiful, strong one! Tell me that I may be like you. Tell *me*.

SAMSON
You? You? You are my lioness, yes. But you are a woman.

DELILAH
The woman you love.

SAMSON
Come closer. Give me the wine.

DELILAH (*giving him the cup*)
You have promised. Last night—my head here on your breast and . . .

SAMSON
I love the scent of your hair in the night.

DELILAH
Tell me.

SAMSON
No.

DELILAH
You mocked me then. (*Angrily.*) Oh, I can be lied to! That pleases you. I must pay for my little fault because I was afraid. I—always I. And you—you—you are like the rest: to take—and lie—and take again. Ah!
(*Rises.*)

SAMSON
Come back, Delilah!

DELILAH
No. (SAMSON *rises and follows her. She sulks.*) No. Leave me alone. Oh, I am yours—yours! But you, you are not mine. I am only one more of your women, I. Go —go to the others. I am weary of you.

SAMSON (*amorously*)
My springtime—my beautiful garden! I love you—love you—love you. Since I saw you by the brook I have known no other woman. It is you—you. At night I waken and lie still, still, beside you as you sleep; and I sing, in my heart, to my God for that he has given you to me. I lie still, still—and then I put my head softly on your heart that I may hear it beat. And I whisper: "Delilah—Delilah!" Come!

DELILAH
Your promise.

SAMSON (*laughing, picks her up in his arms and carries her to the couch. He takes his place, below her on the dais*)
See, I am your slave.

DELILAH (*giving him the wine*)
And your promise . . .

SAMSON
Later—later. What is there now in all this great still night but you and me—and love. Later.

DELILAH
Drink! Drink! Drink to our night! My strong one, now! Now! Bend nearer. Nearer. Whisper it in my ear. The secret.

SAMSON
Why? Why would you know?

DELILAH
If you will tell me—true—listen, I will forsake my god there, Dagon, the god of my fathers, and follow your God—your God—your . . .

SAMSON
Ssh! Speak not His name! You swear that?

DELILAH
I swear that! Drink—Samson—lift up your lips—here.

SAMSON (*suddenly shivering*)
I dreamed last night—I had forgotten. Now it all comes back. I dreamed that I was—oh, God!—blind and in a prison-house. That—oh, blind!—blind!

DELILAH (*hiding her terror*)
Samson! You are a child. See—I laugh at your childish dream. Closer—the secret . . .

SAMSON
Yes, yes—but—ah, *blind!* Yes—oh!—I cannot—I—you swear—swear now!

DELILAH
Samson—I swear! Samson . . .

SAMSON
Yes—ah! Give me the wine. Your eyes! I am afraid of your eyes. And the eyes of God. I am afraid.

DELILAH
Samson . . .

SAMSON
Listen—Delilah . . .
(*He flings himself upon her, his arms about her neck, whispering the secret. As she listens, her eyes flame, a dreadful triumph seems to emanate from her whole body. Slowly she raises herself and slowly* SAMSON *slips from the couch to the floor. When she is on her feet he lies in a stupor upon the floor.*)

(DELILAH *moves up and down the room in a terrible ecstasy, her lips moving in muttered phrases. From time to time she stoops over* SAMSON *to assure herself that he sleeps. She goes to the door, summons the slave, and in pantomime commands a knife. He fetches it and stands*

staring in terror till she drives him out with a menace of the blade. She approaches SAMSON *stealthily. For a long moment she stands over him motionless. She hesitates, her eyes soften, her hand trembles. She springs away as he moves in sleep. Her eyes fall on the empty chest. A spasm of fury shakes her. The decision is made. She kneels and with quick pitiless hands severs from his head the seven sacred locks. She stands up, appalled, the locks in her hand. At last with a gasp she rushes to the curtains, pulls them apart and screams.*)

DELILAH

Samson, Samson! Samson, the Philistines be upon you! (*There is a swift rush of feet outside on the balcony. The Lords of the Philistines crowd in the door.*) Samson —Samson! The Philistines!

SAMSON (*raises himself stupidly, rubbing his eyes*)

Ugh! Ugh! I come. I come. Just as before I come out to them.

(*He staggers to the door.*)

LORD OF THE PHILISTINES

The secret? You have it?

DELILAH

Seize him! His strength is gone!

(*They seize him. He attempts to resist but his strength is indeed gone. They drag him outside.* DELILAH *extinguishes the torches save one by the door. She crouches on the floor by the entrance. One hears hideous cries and groans outside. There is a sound of feet.* DELILAH *shrinks back.* SAMSON *is thrust in. Both eyes have been blinded, blood trickles down his face. He is fettered with iron fetters; his golden circlets and his leopard skin are gone. He whimpers like a wounded beast. There is laughter behind the curtains.* DELILAH *gives a horrifying shriek.*)

CURTAIN (1)

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